

KAMA KATHA



By P. Thomas

KAMA KALPA · HINDU RITUAL OF LOVE

INCREDIBLE INDIA

EPICS, MYTHS & LEGENDS OF INDIA

HINDU RELIGION, CUSTOMS AND MANNERS

THE STORY OF THE CULTURAL EMPIRE OF INDIA

CHRISTIANS AND CHRISTIANITY IN INDIA AND PAKISTAN

CHURCHES IN INDIA

INDIAN WOMEN THROUGH THE AGES

HUMOUR, WIT AND SATIRE FROM INDIAN CLASSICS

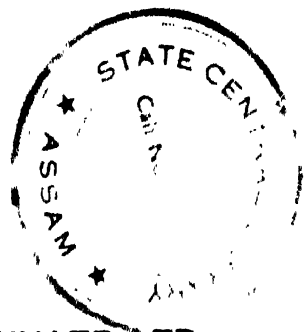
MARCH OF FREE INDIA

KAMA KATHA

**TALES OF
LOVE, WOMANLY WILES AND
DEVOTION FROM THE ANCIENT
INDIAN CLASSICS**

Selected and Retold by **P. THOMAS**

Illustrated by **B. Kalyan**



D. B. TARAPOREVALA SONS & CO. PRIVATE LTD.

210 Dr. D. Naoroji Road, Bombay 1.

PRINTED IN INDIA

**Printed by Homi A. Gazdar at Conway Pvt. Ltd. (Printers), 6, Tulloch Road, Bombay-1 (BR)
and Published by Russi Jal Taraporevala for D. B. Taraporevala Sons & Co. Private Limited,
Dr. D. Naoroji Road, Bombay-1 (BR).**

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INTRODUCTION

ANCIENT INDIA certainly had no monopoly of the story, but some of the most engaging tales of medieval Europe and the Middle East had their origin in India. The well known *Kallah and Dimnah* was but the Arabic version of the Indian *Panchatantra* and the allied *Hlotopadesa*, and a good many of these tales were current in Europe under the name and style of *Tales of Bidpay* or *Pilpay*. La Fontaine's fables too owe much to the *Panchatantra*. A number of stories in the *Arabian Nights*, again, have an Indian origin, and the *Decameron* would show that Boccaccio was acquainted with Indian tales of intrigue and infidelity. Tales have a mysterious way of travelling from country to country, and each tale improved considerably on its journey.

Love of the story is as old as man, but it is difficult to say whether the urge to tell a story or the desire to hear one is the greater. The impulse to story telling is perhaps older than the yearning to listen to a tale, and human speech possibly started with the eagerness of the primal hunter to stutter to his wife the story of the stag that got away. From then on, innumerable story tellers have appeared in various parts of the world and even now the most

engaging human diversion is provided by the story, whether it appears in print, on the screen or the stage.

The oldest known collection of Indian stories is the Jataka tales compiled by persevering Buddhist scholars in the third century before Christ. The importance of the story as a means of imparting religious instruction was recognized by early Buddhist divines, and the Jataka tales, over five hundred in number, have come down to us in the Sutta Pitaka of the Buddhist canon, fixed in the Third Council of Buddhism convened during the reign of Asoka. Claims of knowledge of the previous births of the Buddha, in which he strove after perfection through piety and meritorious deeds, enabled the compilers to identify the Bodhisattva (Buddha-to-be) as the most important character in each of the popular tales current in India at the time, but the difficulty of linking virtue with comprehensiveness is reflected in some of the tales which depict the Blessed One as a thief, gambler or prostitute! On the whole, however, the Jataka tales aim at teaching virtue through the medium of fables.

Allied to the Jatakas is the *Theri Gatha* or 'Songs of Sainted Sisters.'

This work too, like the Jatakas, form part of the Pali canon compiled in the third century B.C. and deals with the stories of renunciation of seventy-two sisters.

Then came the *Mahabharata*, that ancient repository of Indo-Aryan legend and tradition. Though the main theme of the epic is a war of succession between the Kauravas and the Pandavas, cousins, of the lunar dynasty of Indo-Aryan kings, the story teller found himself in his element in this voluminous scripture of the Hindus. The invention of the art of weaving tales into tales rendered the difficult task of introducing illuminating tales in awkward places easy for interpolators with a predilection for narrating stories. Any sage, statesman or sententious scoundrel, when consulted by the dull or the morally weak, was moved to tell a tale, and we have in the *Mahabharata* an unending stream of stories which make the epic one of the most entertaining books in Indian literature.

In the other Indian epic, the *Ramayana* of Valmiki, stories are fewer than in the *Mahabharata*, but the main theme itself is, unlike the loosely knit structure of the longer epic, a grand, compact, harmonious story moving delightfully to a crescendo that ends in the destruction of evil by the good god Rama. Again, the eighteen Puranas, the text-books of popular Hinduism, contain a large number of stories good, bad and indifferent, but most of these are later versions of the tales found in the epics. The Jains too have a voluminous collection of tales known as *Trishashtisalakapurusha* or 'The Lives of the Sixty-three Illustrious Ones', but Jain stories lack the charm and stature of some of the

great tales of the Hindus and Buddhists and hence are less known. All told, fiction dominates the popular religious literature of India.

The *Panchatantra*, however, is secular in character though didactic in import and its beast fables have held a perennial fascination not only for India but, as we have seen, for the whole world. The *Panchatantra* was a text-book too: it was written for the benefit of royal dunces who had to be instructed in the intricate science of statecraft.

The Indian story finds its consummation in Somadeva's *Katha Sarit Sagara* or 'Ocean of Story.' Somadeva drew mainly from an earlier work known as the *Brihad Katha* ('World Story or Great Story') now lost. Somadeva was not only a good compiler but a creative genius as well, and in the 'Ocean of Story' appear many tales not found in other extant works, but as we do not know the entire contents of the *Brihad Katha*, it will not be wise to be dogmatic about Somadeva's originality. Kshemendra, who lived about the same time as Somadeva, compiled a work based on the *Brihad Katha*, but it is not so interesting or voluminous as *Katha Sarit Sagara*.

In the style of *Katha Sarit Sagara*, though smaller, are the anonymous works *Vikramaditya Katha* (thirty-two tales), *Madana Kama Rajan Katha* (twelve tales) and *Suka Saptati* (seventy tales).

Ancient Indian writers specialised in anonymity. Unlike the moderns who never tire of seeing their names in print, ancient authors were averse to publicity and preferred to remain unknown if they possibly could. They

were more anxious to pass their views as authoritative than to publicize their names and lineage, but few of them had any scruples about interpolating existing texts and palming off their own ideas and short stories as the works of hoary sages of antiquity. Hence the real authors of a good many works, including the scriptures in Sanskrit and Pali are unknown and their works stand in the name of legendary sages of high antiquity who were in all probability non-existent. For instance, the *Mahabharata*, consisting of 100,000 stanzas, the eighteen Puranas (some of which almost half as voluminous as the *Mahabharata*) and the four Vedas, are all ascribed to the seer Dwaipayana Vyasa; the difficulty of any intelligent reader believing in the possibility of a single human being, however wonderful, having written so large a number of works pertaining to different periods in history is recognized, and so Vyasa is invested with prodigious longevity and credited with having obtained the services of the skilled calligrapher Ganesha, the elephant-headed deity of the Hindu pantheon.

We have, however, a few original works by known authors. Of these the more important to our subject are *Silappadikaram* by Elango Adigal, *Dasa Kumara Charita* by Dandin, *Mricchakatika* by Sudraka, *Malati-Madhava* by Bhavabhuti, and *Kadambari* (7th century A.D.) by Bana who, however, died before the work was completed. Kalidasa, reckoned the greatest of Indian poets and playwrights, it must be remembered, did not write much that was original. *Shakuntala*, on which his fame rests, was a borrowed theme from the *Mahabharata* though for dramatic effect he

considerably enlarged and altered the original story.

Anyway, after Somadeva, believed to have lived in the eleventh century of the Christian era, India produced no great story teller. Later writers generally borrowed their themes from existing works, mainly from the epics. Generally speaking, the ocean of Indian story stagnated after Somadeva till, lately, the west wind blew and burst into the storm of the novel, the detective story and the two-penny shocker.

In the more entertaining of the ancient tales, as in modern novels, love is the central theme. But unlike the modern novelist writing for a public committed to the orthodox fiction that man, by nature, is monogamous and incapable of falling in love after marriage, the ancient Indian story teller catered for a society which recognised polygyny, concubinage and even polyandry; further, the diversity of caste and the doctrine of transmigration gave the latter an advantage over his Western compeers with their rigid, universally applicable moral codes. For unlike Christianity and Islam, Indian religions taught the inequality of man and the undesirability of all people following the same rules of conduct. Souls in their pristine purity were possibly equal; but once caught in Karma, their long and arduous journey to Nirvana was by different processes and routes, and all souls at any given time, were not in the same stage of evolution. As a general principle, every person was to follow the occupation and rules of conduct determined at birth by the caste in which he or she was born, and deviation was considered a dereliction of duty. What

was good for the Brahmin was not always good for the Sudra, and in story No. 6 the reader will find a sage advising a courtesan to follow religiously her trade for the salvation of her soul.

Further, the Indian story teller was under no immediate obligation to punish wickedness in his moral tales; one life did not put an end to existence, and the sins of any particular life could be expiated in any of the numerous rebirths that lay before the sinner on his weary way to Nirvana. The same doctrine enabled the Indian story teller to satisfactorily explain the strange behaviour of respectable ladies by ascribing it to forgotten loyalties of previous births suddenly remembered. So the oddest human behaviour fitted well into the comprehensive scheme of the ancient Indian story teller, and all shades of love from the crass carnality of Arghagharghatika (story No. 23), who used up men like fuel for a raging furance, to the highly idealised love of Kannaki (story No. 7), found a place in the ocean of Indian story. And in its roaring waters swam all sorts of creatures that make our strange world of facts and fancy—crooks and cranks, sinners and saints, gamblers and misers, ascetics and debauchees, witches and fairies, demons and celestials, faithless wives and devoted Satis, prostitutes and pimps, bawds, sorcerers, nymphs, greedy men and beautiful women who fell for cripples and hunchbacks.

Again, the ancient story teller was not plagued with the modern obsession with true-to-life themes and characters. For him there was no need for a story to be true to life to be appreciated. If anything, the entertainment

value of a tale lay in its improbability, and no writer worth the name thought of wasting his time and that of his reader in depicting real life which any one could see in the streets for himself. What interested the ancients was a vigorous plot of unlikely situations enlivened by the intervention of spirits, celestials and demons, and unconventional behaviour of respectable individuals caught in the grip of past Karma or the curses of potent sages whose words never went in vain.

In his preference for the improbable, the ancient story teller has shown a better appreciation of human nature than the modern novelist; for the current passion for the life-like has so vitiated contemporary literature that even situations that often arise in real life are rejected as improbable in fiction, and as a result the generality of modern readers are finding crime stories and detective tales more interesting than reputedly excellent novels which every one praises as true to life but few care to read.

So in presenting to the reader this collection of love tales of ancient India, I do not claim that they are or were true to life. Most of them abound in miracles and unlikely situations, but these, in themselves, need not necessarily offend modern tastes, for human nature, in spite of the snobbery and sophistication of the few, has remained essentially the same down the ages. Many of Shakespeare's plays like *The Tempest*, *Macbeth*, *Hamlet* and *Midsummer Nights Dream*, still widely performed the world over, delight in witches and wizards, ghosts, spirits and fairies: similarly. *Shakuntala* has a dominant share of the miraculous in its plot but that has not prevented people

from appreciating the play down the centuries to the present day. Further while the ancient Indian story teller had not taken any trouble to paint true pictures of life, many of the stories, nevertheless, give us an inkling into the state of Indian society in different periods of history.

My main difficulty in retelling these ancient stories has been to bring to each tale the style appropriate to it. For while the central theme in every tale is love, the attitude of different story tellers towards sex relations shows wide variations. Some writers considered marital obligations sacred and inviolable (story No. 3), while others were inclined to treat the sanctity of matrimony as a big joke (the author of story No. 11, for instance). Similarly, some writers like Kshemendra treated the courtesan as the most fallen of God's creatures, while others like Sudraka took her for the embodiment of all feminine graces. Hence the reader who wishes to appreciate this selection of Indian tales will do well to

forget a story as soon as he has read it, and start the next one with an open mind.

I may mention that I have not attempted a literal translation of the originals; my intention has been to retain the spirit of each story and present it in a manner and style that can be easily understood by the reader, as there are situations in the originals that may not be readily intelligible to a modern reader not acquainted with Indian social conditions and morals. For the same reason, I have given, wherever necessary, footnotes to explain obscure points in the text.

While the original source, date where known, and context where necessary, have been given in a note under each title, I must particularly acknowledge my indebtedness to the English translations of *Malati-Madhava* and *Mricchakatika* by H. H. Wilson, from which I have taken quotations.

East Fort,
Trichur

P. THOMAS

URVASI AND PURURAVAS

This is, perhaps, the oldest love story on record in Indo-Aryan literature. It appears in the Rig Veda, the most ancient of Indo-Aryan scriptures, compiled about one thousand years before Christ. Several versions of the story are found in the Brahmanas, the Mahabharata and other works including the Puranas but no two versions are alike. Kalidasa's famous play Vikramorvasi or 'Urvasi Won by Valour' was also based on the ancient tale of Urvasi and Pururavas. In the present story the Vishnu Purana version has been followed.

IN KRITA YUGA, the golden age, there lived a great king by name Pururavas. In those far off days celestials moved freely with mortals, and men could marry the nymphs of heaven.

One day, as king Pururavas was roving a charmed forest, he met the Apsara* Urvasi, the most accomplished dancer in the court of Indra, king of the gods. The nymph was of symmetrical form, had heaving breasts and a slender waist, and her flowing tresses reached her ankles.

* The Apsaras are the dancing girls of the court of Indra, and are noted for their beauty and charm.



Struck by the beauty of the lovely fay, king Pururavas fell in love with her. He accosted Urvasi, professed his love and proposed to her. Urvasi herself was taken by the looks and noble bearing of the king, and by his clear bold speech. She accepted his proposal but imposed two conditions on marriage:

She had two pet lambs, she said, and they were her inseparable companions; her husband, Urvasi declared, should undertake to protect them from all harm. This was her first condition; secondly, Urvasi insisted that even after their marriage she should never see her husband naked. If, at any time, the covenant was broken, she claimed the right to leave him.

The king readily agreed to these conditions, and married her. Purura-

vas and Urvasi spent their honeymoon in the forests of Chitraratha, and sixty-one long years passed off like a day.

Now, the Gandharvas* among whom Urvasi had lived before her marriage, missed her. On making enquiries, they discovered that Urvasi had married Pururavas and was living with him in the groves of Chitraratha. They also came to know that before her marriage Urvasi had stipulated two conditions and if her husband failed to keep them she was free to leave him.

So the Gandharvas decided to effect a breach of the contract, and release Urvasi from her marriage bond. Hence, one dark night some of the Gandharvas proceeded to the residence of Pururavas in Chitraratha. They found Urvasi's two pet lambs tied to the cot on which she was sleeping with her husband. After making sure that the couple were fast asleep, the Gandharvas crept into the room and stole one of the lambs. The bleat of the lamb woke up Urvasi and she shouted for help, on which Pururavas woke up too. He was not, however, dressed and so, he dared not get up from his bed lest Urvasi should see him naked. Distressed by the loss of her pet lamb, Urvasi upbraided the king but he explained to her what prevented him from pursuing the robbers; thus pacified, Urvasi again laid herself to rest.

When the two had fallen asleep once again, the gang of Gandharvas who were prowling about the place, quietly stole in and removed the other lamb. The bleat of the lamb again woke up



In Hindu mythology, Gandharvas are mentioned as the choristers of Indra's court.

Urvasi and in sheer despair she cried out how there could be security in a kingdom where thieves could steal with impunity the king's own treasured possessions, from under his very bed, and when there was not one strong man to stop or punish the culprits. The lamentation of Urvasi made the king forget his vows, and he jumped up from his bed, though undressed, to pursue the robbers. But the cunning Gandharvas caused a sudden flash of lightning to flood the room with light, and Urvasi saw Pururavas standing before her stark naked. The offended fay immediately left him, and went away with the Gandharvas.

The grief caused by the loss of Urvasi deranged the king's mind, and the demented Pururavas left his kingdom and wandered in strange lands in search of his beloved. He would enquire of not only humans but even of the trees, animals and birds of the forest, if any of them had seen his Urvasi. After years of wandering without proper food, drink or shelter, Pururavas, wan and wasted, at last came to a lotus lake in Kurukshetra where he saw some fays sporting in its waters. And here he found, to his unutterable joy, Urvasi, gay, fresh and lovely as ever, bathing in the lake.

'Pray, come with me, O beautiful but cruel one,' cried Pururavas; 'how could you ever leave your Pururavas?'

'In what way am I cruel, O king?' asked Urvasi; 'I left you only after you broke your plighted word. . . . So pray, do not tarry here. Forget me as I came like the west wind and went like the east wind. Proceed to thy kingdom, O king, and resume your royal duties.'

On this Pururavas said: 'I will not go to my kingdom, my dear one. If you

do not come with me, I will rush away to the farthest region on earth, never to return. I will rush to the nether world, or else will put an end to myself in this very forest, and the wolves and wild dogs of the forest shall devour my body.'

The fay now softened towards her lover. 'Pururavas,' said she, 'do not kill yourself; do not let the wolves and wild dogs devour your body; and do not rush away to far places. . . . You must know that I am not now free to do what I want, but I share my life with the Gandharvas. And I cannot leave them for good. But, O king, the sweet memories of the wonderful days I lived with you in the groves of Chitraratha always haunt me, and I will, every year, pay you a visit.'

Though the king pressed her to come with him Urvasi, by persuasive speech, made him realise that she could not leave the Gandharvas, and finally Pururavas agreed to go back to his kingdom and attend to his royal duties. He then left the lake and returned to his palace, his body and mind restored to soundness and health.

Urvasi, true to her promise, visited Pururavas once a year, but his desire for her company only increased with every visit of the fay, and he lived counting the days and nights, ever contemplating her. At last even the Gandharvas were moved to pity for him, and they decided to translate him into their world so that he could live with Urvasi for ever.

Accordingly, the Gandharvas sent Urvasi to Pururavas with a brazier charged with fire for the performance of a fire rite in a charmed forest, which was to ensure the king's trans-

formation to the world of Gandharvas.

Pururavas immediately took the brazier from Urvasi and went to the forest to perform the rite that was to permanently unite him with his beloved. But as he started the ritual, he remembered that he had left Urvasi unattended on the outskirts of the forest, and leaving the brazier at the sacrificial ground, the king returned to fetch Urvasi. But when he reached the place where he had left her, he found to his distress that Urvasi had gone.

Determined to perform the ritual, he went back to the forest where he had left the brazier and, again to his dismay, found that the brazier too had disappeared in his absence.

As the king stood undecided in the

sacrificial ground, he noticed that two trees, one Shami and the other Asvatha, had sprung up at the spot where he had left the brazier. Breaking a branch of each, Pururavas produced fire by friction and performed the sacrifice as directed by the Gandharvas, and he was immediately transformed into a Gandharva. And he lived ever after in the world of the Gandharvas with his beloved Urvasi.

(As the tale indicates, Pururavas was in all probability the legendary inventor of the art of fire-making among the Aryans. Prometheus of the Greeks and Pururavas of the Hindus have possibly a common origin).

2

THE SEDUCTION OF RISHYASRINGA

The well known Indian epic, the Mahabharata, reputed the longest single poem in the world, has a range of centuries and is the repository of Indo-Aryan legend and tradition. It is ascribed to the semi-mythical sage Vyasa, compiler of the Vedas. The original work was possibly composed by Vyasa, but later many anonymous writers added to the original and the book in its present form is a loose disconnected work completed in the early centuries of the Christian era and deals with all conceivable subject, sacred and profane. The main theme of the epic is a war of succession between cousins, the Kauravas and the Pandavas, of the lunar line of kings; but linked to it, often artificially, are numerous episodes and didactic matter that cover practically the entire Indo-Aryan traditional lore. The art of weaving tales into tales, familiar to the readers of Arabian Nights, has facilitated the work of the interpolator who would make a character narrate a tale or deliver a philosophical discourse by way of explaining an obscure point or situation. The story of Rishyasringa, here narrated, is a tale so woven into the fabric of the main theme.

LONG LONG ago, when Lomapada was the king of Anga, there was a dreadful drought in his kingdom. The rivers, lakes, pools, tanks and wells dried up, crops failed, and the people of Anga stood in grave danger of perishing through famine and pestilence. In this predicament, king Lomapada called to his court all the learned men of the land and asked them how

rainfall could be caused and the country saved from destruction.

Many men suggested several remedies but at last one learned Brahmin, proficient in sacred lore, thus addressed the king and his assembly: 'The spiritual heat generated by Tapas (ascetic penances) is the primary cause of drought and sterility. Asceticism is the direst enemy of fertility; it

is the negation of life and all that it stands for. Our land is scorched by drought because in the forest adjoining our kingdom lives the young ascetic Rishyasringa who has never seen a woman. His father, the mighty sage Vibhandaka, takes particular care not to let his son see a woman, and the blazing purity of Rishyasringa dries up the rain-bearing clouds that pass over our kingdom. Therefore I would suggest that we find some means by which Rishyasringa be lured to the ways of mortal men, and made to marry and settle down as a householder. This and this alone would ensure rainfall and fertility for our beloved land.'

The Brahmin who thus spoke was the wisest man in all Anga, and the learned men of the court concurred with him. They now discussed among themselves how best to lure Rishyasringa to the pleasures of the world and get him wedded. The king was prepared to give his own daughter in marriage to the young ascetic, but the big problem was how to get Rishyasringa interested in a woman. After prolonged discussion, the council came to the conclusion that direct proposals of marriage would be futile, as Vibhandaka, Rishyasringa's father, was a confirmed misogynist and would burn to ashes, by his scorching rage, any one who took such a proposal to him; so, it was decided to seduce Rishyasringa without the knowledge of his father.

None, however, dared to undertake the perilous mission. The sage Vibhandaka was well known for his ill temper, and it was clear to every one that the person who would seduce Rishyasringa should be prepared to fall under the

curse of the sage and face death and hell.

The king, finding that none would volunteer to go to Vibhandaka with the marriage proposal, sent for the court-esans of the city to find out if any one among them, well-versed in the art of seduction, would undertake the task of seducing Rishyasringa. When the king put the proposal to the courtesans, all of them, who knew well enough what the mission meant, remained silent as if struck dumb. At last an old bawd, crooked as a root and wrinkled as a dried grape, stood up and thus addressed king Lomapada: 'Your Majesty! I am old and decrepit, but my daughter is young, beautiful and clever. I know the ways of men; I will give special lessons to my daughter in the art of seduction of ascetics who have not seen women, and I am sure she will be able to seduce Rishyasringa. Once the young man tastes the pleasures of love, it will be easy for you to get him married to the princess... I know my task is a dangerous one and we might meet with disaster, my daughter and I, but for saving our kingdom and your royal house I will undertake this mission.'

The king and the people lauded the bawd. Lomapada gave her many presents, and the Brahmins showered their blessings on her. And amidst the cheers and prayers of the good people of Anga, the old bawd and her young daughter and a troop of heart-ravishers, departed from the city to the forest.

On reaching the boundary of the kingdom, the bawd pitched her camp at the outskirts of the forest where Rishyasringa and Vibhandaka dwelt. Leaving the main body of her followers in the camp, the bawd and her

daughter, with a few trusted companions, set out in search of Vibhandaka's hermitage. Wandering through trackless forests, at last they came in sight of the hermitage and hiding themselves under thickets watched to find out who all were inside. They saw young Rishyasringa in the yard, apparently busy with his afternoon routine, and observation convinced them that the young man was alone in the hermitage and his father was out.

The bawd decided the time was opportune, and so after giving her daughter certain useful hints, she sent her on her fateful mission; she herself remained in hiding with her companions and prayed to all the gods for her daughter's success in seduction.

It turned out as the bawd had thought. Vibhandaka had gone into the deeper regions of the forest to collect berries for the evening meal, and young Rishyasringa was alone in the hermitage. On seeing the charming courtesan, the young ascetic felt a thrill, an experience he had never had in his life before; he was consciously looking at a woman for the first time, as Vibhandaka had weaned him in infancy, and had brought him up in his hermitage away from the degenerating influence of women.

The sweet smiles of the beautiful courtesan, her honeyed words, gay gait and poise, fascinated the young ascetic. She offered him fruits which tasted sweeter than any he had ever eaten. She was lightly clad, and as she sat near him and passed her arms round his bare body, he was physically thrilled. He could not take his eyes off her. He was intrigued by her full, globular breasts, so soft to the touch, and as she embraced him their



pressure on his chest sent a thrill down his spine. The young ascetic completely forgot his daily duties in the company of the charming girl and spent his time in dalliance with her. And as Rishyasringa was thoroughly worked up, the courtesan quietly slipped away, smiling sweetly. She returned to her companions and her mother, and they beat a hasty retreat to their camp, as the sun was going down and Vibhandaka was expected back any moment.

When Vibhandaka returned to his hermitage that evening, he saw his son sitting gloomily in the yard without having performed any of his daily duties. He had not picked the flowers for the evening ritual; he had not swept and cleaned the hermitage; he had not even collected the faggots for laying the fire for cooking the supper. Finding an inexplicable change in his son, Vibhandaka asked Rishyasringa: 'Why, my son, have you done none of your daily duties today? What has happened to you? Did any one come to our hermitage today in my absence?'

Rishyasringa replied: 'Yes, father; in your absence came here a wonderful youth. He was resplendent as a god, radiant as the morning sun. He had the face of the full moon in a cloudless sky. He had long, black, glossy tresses and his eyes were like a pair of blue lotuses. From his snow-white neck hung a gleaming pendent. Beneath his neck rose two soft, well-shaped globes, pressing rebelliously against each other, and they were most delightful to play with. He had a slender waist, but plump, sumptuous hips, and his colourful clothes were gathered in wavy folds by a girdle shining like the rosy rays of the rising sun. On his wrists were lustrous bangles and on his ankles he wore little bells that jingled as he moved. And

he walked with the ease and grace of a gazelle.

'The words of this youth were like nectar to me. When the gentle breeze fanned him, scents sweeter than those of forest flowers filled the air. The youth was playful as a fawn. He took me in his arms, pressed me to his bosom and as his lips drank mine, O father, I felt the bliss of heaven! And then alas! My companion disappeared as suddenly as he came. O, my father, I cannot live without that wonderful young man, so unlike me! Pray take me to his hermitage. I will keep the vows he keeps, do the penance he practises and live the life he lives. My soul burns for a sight of that chaste, enchanting youth!'

On this Vibhandaka sank into a reflective mood. He felt some fay or nymph, sent by the wily Indra, who was always jealous of sages practising asceticism, had come to the forest to tempt his young son. So he told Rishyasringa to be on his guard against temptresses, and warned him that voluptuous Apsaras often disturbed the asceticism of great sages and that he should, for the salvation of his soul, keep his mind and body under strict control.

All this good advice was, however, lost upon young Rishyasringa. For next morning, when Vibhandaka went out into the forest, Rishyasringa prayed that the youth who had visited him the previous day should come again to him. His mind was so absorbed in the vision of the charming visitor that he could think of nothing else.

And the enchanting visitor did come, and that too immediately after Vibhandaka had left. Rishyasringa knew that his father would punish him



on his return if he found out that he had encouraged the forbidden visitor; besides, he felt it would be much more pleasant to live in the hermitage of the visitor in his delightful company than drudge in the gloomy and lonesome hermitage of his father. Hence, as soon as the visitor had come, without losing any time, Rishyasringa said: 'Let us not tarry here; my father does not approve of you. Let us escape to your hermitage before he returns.'

A second request was not necessary. The victim had fallen into the net even before it had been spread! The courtesan took Rishyasringa to her mother who, with her train and the ascetic, immediately fled to the capital of Anga where the king and the people were anxiously waiting for her return.

The company of the delightful young girls of the bawd's establishment charmed Rishyasringa. He had never enjoyed such pleasures before, and in the charmed atmosphere of the pleasure palace of the heart-ravishers, he forgot his austere father and his hermitage.

The dry air of Anga now became moist, and clouds began to appear in the sky. The time was opportune, and Lomapada bestowed his young and beautiful daughter Shanta in marriage on the thawed ascetic, who found the princess and the palace much more delightful than the girls and their establishment that he had left in the city.

Lomapada, in the meantime, had taken precautions to meet the possible ire of Vibhandaka. As soon as the bawd with the ascetic had arrived in his capital, the king ordered the people

to line up on either side of the road from the city, right down to the hermitage of Vibhandaka, and they, on the arrival of the sage at the hermitage, prayed him, with folded hands to take pity on them and come to their kingdom even as his son had done. Vibhandaka saw the famished people and was moved by compassion for them. 'Verily,' said he to himself, 'all creatures are born in sorrow, live in sorrow and die in sorrow, but prefer to be alive, under any condition whatsoever, rather than be dead. And to preserve life they stoop to every evil! And so let it be with the people of Anga.'

The sage stood undecided for a moment in his hermitage when he learnt what had happened, and then amidst the supplications of the people walked gloomily to the capital of Anga. On the way, wherever he looked, he met a lamenting crowd, and on reaching the city, the king himself came with his retinue to greet him, bowed submissively to him and conducted him to the palace. Here, the king and the courtiers told the sage how the whole country had nearly perished for want of rain, and how his son had saved the kingdom and the people. And they begged him to pardon them for any wrong they might have done in their ignorance and distress.

And Vibhandaka, who had come to curse Anga, went back to his hermitage blessing the king, the people, and the newly-weds, Shanta and Rishyasringa.

And now rain fell in abundance in the kingdom of Anga.

3

NALA AND DAMAYANTI

This story of Nala and Damayanti, one of the most popular of Indian tales, is narrated in the epic Mahabharata to illustrate the evils of gambling. Ancient Indo-Aryans were partial to the dice and there are even charms in the Vedas for achieving luck in the game. It was, in fact, a point of honour with kings to accept a challenge to a gambling contest as refusal was reckoned tantamount to cowardice. Yudhishtira, the hero of the Mahabharata, it may be recalled, was defeated by his opponents by foul play in a game of dice, lost all his possessions and even his kingdom, and had to wander in the forests for many years with his brothers.

LONG LONG ago there lived a king by name Nala, who was the ruler of Nishadha. Nala was as handsome as a god, brave as a lion, and in the three worlds there was not his equal in horsemanship.

One day while young Nala was walking in the royal park, he noticed some swans swimming in a lake in the park. Struck by the beauty of the plumage of one of the swans, the prince caught it. The bird was frightened and prayed to be released; on this Nala assured the swan that he meant no harm and had caught it merely out of curiosity. Greatly relieved, the swan started talking. It had its home in the Himalayan regions, the bird said, but had visited lakes, rivers and ponds in many lands,

royal parks and pools the world over; but in all its rangings had never come across so beautiful a princess as Damayanti, daughter of Bhimaka, king of Vidarbha. Nala was interested in the beauty, and the bird described her graces so well that Nala could form in his mind an image of Damayanti, and fell in love with the fair princess.

The swan declared that no two could ever make a better couple in the world than Nala and Damayanti; further, the bird told the prince that it was a regular visitor to the royal park of Vidarbha, and it undertook, on Nala's request, to convey a message of love from the prince to Damayanti.

After a few days the swan came back to Nala and report-

ed that it had described Nala and his accomplishments to Damayanti so well that the princess swore that she would wed none but the prince of Nishadha, and was anxiously waiting for the day when she would be able to meet him. Nala thanked the bird for its interest in him, and spent his days contemplating the beauty of Damayanti.

King Bhimaka decided to get his daughter married according to the Swayamvara* rite, befitting his royal clan, and sent invitations to all the eligible kings and princes known to him, so that Damayanti could choose a bridegroom for herself. Like the other kings, Nala too was invited for the Swayamvara.

On the appointed day, prince Nala proceeded to Vidarbha in his finest chariot, drawn by his swiftest horses. On the way he was, however, stopped by a party of four persons bound for Vidarbha, and he was surprised to learn that the wayfarers were actually four gods: Indra, god of the firmament; Varuna, god of waters; Agni, god of fire; and Yama, god of death—all going to Vidarbha to wed Damayanti of whose beauty and accomplishments they had heard from the celestial minstrel Narada.

When the gods were told by Nala that he too was going for the Swayamvara, they became apprehensive; for the prince looked even more handsome than the gods, and they feared that the fair Damayanti might choose him for her husband in preference to one of them. So they decided on a

plan which would prevent the princess from choosing Nala, even if he attended the Swayamvara.

With this end in view they made Nala promise on oath that he would comply with a request of theirs whatever it would be. After this, the gods asked him to go to Damayanti as a messenger from them with a request to choose one of them as her husband in her forthcoming Swayamvara. Poor Nala did not know what to do. Unable to give a downright refusal because of his solemn promise, he put forward many excuses to get himself out of the difficulty; he pleaded, for instance, that it was impossible for him to enter the harem of Bhimaka and meet Damayanti. But all the difficulties of Nala were satisfactorily settled for him by the gods; as regards the problem of getting into the harem of Bhimaka, they gave him a magic cloak by wearing which he could enter the harem unseen by any one except Damayanti. Thus forced, Nala went on his reluctant errand.



* The Swayamvara was a form of marriage prevalent among kings in ancient India; a number of eligible suitors were invited by the father of the bride who selected her husband from the assembled guests.

The unwilling intermediary entered the palace of Vidarbha with mixed feelings. While he cursed his fate, which made him undertake an enterprise that was to deprive him of his cherished love, he was in a way glad to have a sight of Damayanti whom he had so far known only through the description given by the swan. So wandering through the spacious palaces of Bhimaka, Nala at last saw Damayanti, sitting alone in the royal park, obviously dreaming of her lover. Damayanti was even more beautiful and resplendent than he had imagined. And the thought that she was for ever to be lost to the gods and that too through his intercession, depressed and almost broke the heart of the prince.

But, Nala was on oath to perform a duty, and he would not shirk it for anything in the world. So he slowly walked up to Damayanti, and the young princess started at the sudden appearance of a stranger before her. In order to prevent her from taking fright and raising alarm, Nala immediately told her that he was a friendly messenger from the gods who had asked him to plead for them; they were taken up by her beauty and accomplishments, he told her, and had decided to attend her Swayamvara; finally, he described to her the greatness of each of the four gods who were on their way to Vidarbha, and asked her to choose one of them.

More than this surprising message from the celestials, what interested Damayanti was the handsome messenger himself. She had not seen Nala, but from the detailed description of his appearance the swan had given her, Damayanti had conjured up a picture of Nala in her mind, and the

strange visitor before her looked very much like her picture come to life. She now put him on oath and asked him to reveal his identity. At first, he gave evasive replies, and dwelt at length on the qualifications of the celestials for her hand; but Damayanti, turning a deaf ear to these panegyrics, insisted on a direct reply to her question, and Nala was obliged to tell her who he really was, and how he had come to her with his strange message.

On hearing his story, Damayanti smiled and said: 'You have pleaded ably for the gods, my lord, but go and tell them that I have already wed Nala, prince of Nishadha, and the good gods might as well spare themselves the trouble of further travel, and return to their celestial abode.'

Nala was in his heart happy to hear this, but he had a duty to perform, and he ostentatiously chided her for her folly and infatuation. 'What woman,' he asked her, 'has ever preferred a mortal to the gods? Wedded to one of the celestials, young princess, you shall attain immortal bliss to attain which men and women ceaselessly strive, by austerities, fasts and painful penances!'

'I know, my lord, all this,' replied Damayanti; 'but the object of my life is not immortality but wedding Nala, prince of Nishadha.'

Nala, finding his arguments in favour of immortality not progressing well, tried to work on Damayanti's fears; he painted lurid pictures of hell life, reserved for those who offended divinities, and asked her to comply with the demand of the gods in order to avert their anger. But Damayanti assured the gods' advocate that all would be well with her, and asked him to return to the gods and tell them defi-

nately and finally that she was unable to wed any of them.

Nala was thus obliged to go back and report to the gods the failure of his mission. He told them that he had pleaded for them with all the eloquence he was capable of, but the lady had turned down his proposals. The gods, on their part, assured Nala that they believed him; for they were present at the scene invisible to Nala and Damayanti, they revealed, and had seen that the mission had failed not due to any want of sincerity on the part of the messenger. The gods were not, however, prepared to go back, but decided to proceed to Vidarbha to attend the Swayamvara. Damayanti, after all, had not seen them, and she might, they thought, change her mind on seeing how wonderful they were.

For the Swayamvara of Damayanti, sat assembled in the great wedding hall, all the well-known kings of the world. At the appointed hour, princess Damayanti entered the hall, dressed in bridal vestments and holding the wedding garland, like a meteor in the star-studded firmament. Before the princess went Sarasvati herself, the goddess of eloquence, whose services Bhimaka had obtained for the occasion by penance and propitiation.

On a signal from the master of ceremonies, the pair started on their round, and Sarasvati described to Damayanti, the name, lineage and accomplishments of each suitor. And every suitor whom the princess passed was sunk in despair by her silent rejection of his suit.

As Damayanti approached Nala, the all-knowing Sarasvati stood discreetly silent; for she noticed five persons sitting in a row, all exactly like Nala, and

the real Nala could not be distinguished from the rest. Damayanti, seeing the five Nala's and noticing Sarasvati's embarrassment, stood undecided for a moment; then she addressed a mental prayer to the gods, who, she knew, were the four suitors who had assumed the form of Nala to confuse her. She prayed to the gods to respect her feelings and her vow as she had already chosen Nala for her lord, and asked them to aid her in distinguishing the real Nala out of the five. The virtuous gods, thus put on their honour, assumed their real forms and sat without touching their seats, a feat only gods could achieve. And Damayanti bestowed the wedding garland on Nala.

All the rejected suitors, though disappointed, felt that Nala was the fittest bridegroom for Damayanti, and congratulated him on winning the love of the princess. The gods too blessed the couple, and Agni, god of fire, gave Nala a special boon by which he could produce fire whenever needed, without wood, tinder or flint.

After receiving the blessings of all, Nala and Damayanti took leave of Bhimaka and the queens, and went to Nishadha.

Now the four gods, on their way back to heaven, met on the road Kali, the evil genius of Kaliyuga.* The gods asked Kali, who appeared to be in haste, whither he was hurrying, and Kali told them that he was going to Vidarbha as a suitor for the hand of Damayanti. The gods, laughing, told Kali that there was no need for that

* In Hindu mythology, the present age is known as Kaliyuga or the age of evil and the wicked Kali is believed to be its presiding deity.

haste, as the wedding was over and the princess had married Nala, prince of Nishadha.

'And you were there as suitors?' asked Kali in obvious surprise.

'Sure, we were,' replied the gods.

'And you let the princess marry a mere mortal like Nala while you were sitting there?'

'What else could we do? The princess had set her heart upon Nala, and she bestowed the wedding garland upon him!'

'I have never seen such a set of helpless imbeciles like you in the three worlds,' cried Kali in a rage; 'for my part, I will not rest till I have taught this impertinent woman and her husband a severe lesson.'

The gods, in an effort to stop Kali from doing harm to Nala and Damayanti, informed him of all that had happened, assured him that the two were an ideal couple and he, Kali, should be happy that the fair princess was so well matched. But the evil Kali was determined to avenge his fancied humiliation, and swearing that he would soon bring about the ruin of Nala and Damayanti, hurried towards Nishadha, the kingdom of Nala.

Kali decided to possess Nala and derange his mind. But the prince was so virtuous, and he performed his religious and secular duties so well and correctly, that Kali could not find an opportunity to possess him, and had to lie in wait for many a long year. After several years had passed, however, an irregularity occurred one day in Nala's ablutions, and the watching Kali, finding the chance he had been waiting for so long, possessed Nala. Soon after, Pushkara, Nala's brother whom Kali had already commissioned to

usurp the throne, challenged Nala to a gambling contest, and Nala, his senses deranged by Kali, accepted the challenge.

In the game, Nala began to lose heavily. Personal belongings, villages, districts and principalities were lost to Pushkara; and Nala, in spite of Damayanti's remonstrances, persisted in the game. Fearing the worst, Damayanti therefore sent her two children to her father's palace in Vidarbha.

Soon the worst did happen. Pushkara won steadily, and Nala lost his entire kingdom and everything else that belonged to him. On this, Pushkara promptly ordered Nala out of the kingdom, and assumed the rulership of Nishadha.

Nala told Damayanti that the best thing she could do in the circumstances was to return to her father's palace during his exile from his kingdom.

'No,' protested Damayanti, 'my place is not in my father's house, but with my husband. If you go into exile, I go with you to suffer the privations you suffer. The wife has to share with her husband his misfortunes as well as his prosperity. If, however, you insist on my going to my father's house, we will go together and consult him as how best we can retrieve our lost fortune.'

This, the pride of Nala would not let him do. So on a dark night, when every one was asleep, Nala and Damayanti stole out of their palace, unknown to the sleeping citizens.

They travelled all night, and by daybreak reached a forest on the outskirts of their kingdom. They lived on the wild berries they picked and the edible roots they could dig up in the forest. In their attempt to traverse the



forest and escape into some kingdom where they would not be known, Nala and Damayanti found themselves in a wild pathless region, and were put to untold hardships as the vast inhospitable jungle was without water or edible vegetation and they had to starve for days and go without anything to stay their thirst.

Then one day Nala saw a flock of birds and decided to catch some for food. So he took off the cloth he was wearing, and used it as a net with which to snare the birds. The birds were caught in the net, but it was not heavy enough, and the birds flew off with the cloth, leaving Nala naked in the jungle.

Nala became desperate. The relentless Kali perverted his reasoning and he indulged in mad logic; if he were to desert Damayanti in that wild region, thought he, she would find

her way to her father's kingdom and would be rid, once for all, of the miseries of forest life. So that night, before they went to sleep, Nala casually mentioned to Damayanti the location of the jungle they were then in, and the direction of the various adjoining kingdoms including Vidarbha, as though he were just describing these things to satisfy Damayanti's curiosity. The unsuspecting Damayanti, wearied by the travel of the day, fell asleep and Nala, who was keeping awake on purpose, arose from her side and quietly tore off part of the clothes she was wearing; clad in this, he took silent farewell of her and fled from the spot, consigning his wife to the care of the godlings of the forest.

When Damayanti woke up in the morning, she did not see Nala. At first she thought he was hiding some-

where in play. She could not bring herself to believe that he was capable of deserting her in that terrible forest. So she called out his name and made a desperate search for him; but nowhere could she find Nala. The horrible truth now stared her in the face. Nala had deserted her! Crying out 'Nala, Nala,' the poor woman started running about the forest like a demented creature.

As luck would have it, a party of traders happened to cross the forest that very day, and the merchants seeing Damayanti, took her, out of pity, into their camp, and promised to leave her in the city to which they were going. But that night a herd of wild elephants attacked the caravan and the superstitious merchants put down this catastrophe to the presence of Damayanti in their camp; a man, who claimed to know demonology, pronounced her a witch, and the traders, to save themselves from harm from the evil one, drove her away from their camp.

Thus, once again Damayanti was condemned to wander alone in that dreary forest. After many adventures with wild beasts and wilder men, at last she crossed the forest and reached the city of Chedi. Clad in rags, her locks glued together and her body bruised by brambles, her feet swollen, Damayanti looked more like a mad beggar woman than the queen she was, and the children in the streets of Chedi threw stones at the apparition. Thus tormented, she happened to pass by the palace of Chedi, and the queen took pity on her and sent her attendants to bring her in.

The queen could see from Damayanti's bearing and manner of speech

that she was not a beggar woman, and asked her who she was. Damayanti told her that she was a merchant's daughter, that while travelling with her father their caravan was attacked by wild beasts in the forests, and that all her people were killed and she alone had escaped with her bare life. Hearing her sweet, chaste speech and noticing her courtly manners, the queen wished to take her into her service, and Damayanti, on being asked, agreed as she had no desire, she said, to go back to her native city as all her dear ones had perished in the forest. And so Damayanti stayed on in the palace of Chedi.

In the meantime, king Bhimaka, Damayanti's father, had not been idle. As soon as he came to know of the exile of Nala and Damayanti, he sent able messengers throughout the adjoining kingdoms to look for them. And one of these messengers of Bhimaka came to the court of Chedi when Damayanti was living here. He happened to see Damayanti, recognised her, and informed the queen about it. The queen of Chedi was herself related to Bhimaka and though she had not actually seen Damayanti, had heard of the exile of Nala and Damayanti and was grieving for them; on learning that her new employee was Damayanti herself, she chided her for hiding her true identity. Anyway she felt happy that Damayanti was with her, and she learnt from her all that had happened to them in Nishadha and in the forest. The queen felt that Bhimaka would not now rest till Nala was found, and Damayanti could effectively help him in his search, and so she sent her with a fitting escort to Vidarbha.

As Damayanti was having her misadventure with the merchants and the wild beasts, Nala was wandering in another part of the same forest. While trying to cross over to some inhabited place, he reached a region where a wild fire was raging and noticed a huge serpent, surrounded by fire, trying to escape. Nala, out of pity for the trapped reptile, saved it from the flames, at great personal danger to himself. As soon as the serpent was out of danger, it thanked Nala, announced it was actually the Naga prince Karkodaka condemned to live in the forest by a curse, and bit its saviour. Nala was immediately transformed into an ugly, swarthy fellow, and the king asked Karkodaka what kind of a reward this was for his help. Karkodaka assured Nala that it was a blessing in disguise; he knew, he said, who his saviour was, and bit him on purpose so that he could go about at will without being recognised. Karkodaka also predicted that Nala's misfortunes would end shortly, and advised him to go to Ayodhya and take service under king Rituparna who knew the mystic science of numbers, the dread of the evil Kali. Karkodaka gave Nala instructions on how to reach Ayodhya quickly and taught him an incantation by repeating which he could regain his original form.

Travelling by the route suggested by Karkodaka, Nala reached Ayodhya, gave his name as Bahuka and sought employment with king Rituparna as his charioteer. Rituparna was struck by the wonderful display of horsemanship by Bahuka and readily gave him the situation he had applied for.

Meanwhile, Damayanti who had reached her father's kingdom, was making efforts to find out the whereabouts of her husband. She sent messengers to all the regions known to her to find Nala, and a Brahmin, so sent by her, came to the court of Rituparna in Ayodhya. While talking about Damayanti, the astute Brahmin noticed Bahuka's interest in her. He enquired of Rituparna who Bahuka was, but the king could give no information about him except that he was a newly appointed charioteer; Rituparna, however, assured the Brahmin that Bahuka could in no way be Nala; for he, Rituparna, was himself one of the suitors who had attended Damayanti's Swayamvara and had seen Nala, he said, and the ugly Bahuka was as different from Nala as the crow is from the peacock. Anyway, the Brahmin wished to ask Bahuka a question Damayanti had instructed him to put to any person suspected of being Nala. So he sought out Bahuka in private, fell into conversation with him, and as if musing to himself, said: 'Where art thou fled, O heartless gambler, leaving me alone in the wilderness with half my clothes?'

On hearing this Bahuka was visibly moved; he replied: 'The gambler, O lady, was beside himself when he left you, and the unworthy man asks for forgiveness!'

The Brahmin could not make much sense of the reply, but he felt that Bahuka, though not Nala himself, knew something about Nala; but his instructions were not to make open enquiries lest Nala should try to evade detection, and so he went back to Vidarbha without rousing the suspicions of Bahuka.

When the Brahmin returned home and had reported to Damayanti the reply Bahuka had given to her query, her hopes rose high, but the description the messenger gave of Bahuka was extremely disappointing. Anyway, Damayanti wanted to see Bahuka; if he himself was not Nala, she thought like the Brahmin messenger who had seen him, that he could give her reliable information about Nala. So she selected a trusted, discreet messenger and sent him to Ayodhya with a message from Bhimaka, that Damayanti was to be remarried as the whereabouts of Nala were not known, and inviting Rituparna for her second wedding. The message was contrived to reach Rituparna the day previous to the date of the supposed wedding; Damayanti knew that only Nala could drive a chariot from Ayodhya to Vidarbha in a day.

Rituparna and Bahuka were considerably surprised to learn about Damayanti's remarriage, but the latter undertook to drive Rituparna's chariot from Ayodhya to Vidarbha in a day. Bahuka selected for the purpose the leanest horses from the stables and the lightest chariot. And when he got the vehicle ready and applied the goad, the animals seemed to fly with the chariot. So great indeed was the speed of the horses that when Rituparna accidentally dropped his scarf and would have stopped to pick it up, Bahuka said that they had already passed leagues, and drove without stopping. As the chariot was thus speeding, Rituparna, who was amazed at the horsemanship of his charioteer, wanted to spring a surprise on him and told Bahuka the exact number of leaves, flowers and fruits on a tree that stood

on the road, and Bahuka pulled up the reins to check this. The king told him that they would be late, but Bahuka assured the king that he would take him on time to Vidarbha; Bahuka then counted the leaves, flowers and fruits on the tree, and found the number correct as given by Rituparna.

Each of them now wished to learn the other's art, and accordingly, Rituparna taught Bahuka the mystery of numbers and Bahuka taught his master the science of horsemanship. And the moment Bahuka had learnt the mystery of numbers, Kali, to whom it was anathema, left him. But he retained his swarthy form, as he did not wish to reveal his identity to Rituparna.

Rituparna was considerably disappointed and Bahuka relieved to see that there were no obvious preparations for a wedding at the palace in Vidarbha. But both put down the absence of pageantry to a possible desire on the part of Bhimaka to conduct the second marriage in a quiet manner. Rituparna even felt that Bhimaka wished to bestow Damayanti on him without ceremony, as apparently he alone had been invited.

Damayanti was anxiously waiting for the arrival of Rituparna, and when she noticed, from a tower in the palace, the chariot coming, whirling through the sky as it were, she felt sure that the charioteer could be none other than Nala. But on seeing him, she was sorely disappointed, for the ugly Bahuka could in no way be her handsome husband.

Anyway, Damayanti wanted to know if Bahuka had any information about Nala, and to find this out, she detailed a clever Brahmin to watch every movement and gesture of Bahuka and

study his reactions when the name of Nala was mentioned. The Brahmin, who engaged Bahuka in diverting conversation, mentioned casually about the fate of Damayanti and asked him if, in Ayodhya, any one had heard of the whereabouts of Nala. Bahuka was visibly agitated and said: 'Of Nala's self, only Nala knows.'

On the Brahmin reporting this to Damayanti, she asked the kitchen staff not to serve Bahuka any cooked food; only raw food was to be given him, she ordered, and spies were posted to watch him.

And the spies did report something wonderful. For Bahuka, they said, produced fire from nowhere and within a matter of moments, had all the food cooked, ready to be served. Damayanti asked the spies to bring her a morsel of the cooked food, and when it was brought, tasted it. Damayanti wept on tasting the food; for it was undoubtedly of Nala's cooking, and memories of the happy days she had spent in Nishadha with him, when he used to cook for fun, producing fire by the favour of Agni, rushed to her mind. She was now quite sure that Bahuka could be none other than Nala, and for a last test she sent her children to him and watched him unseen. On seeing his children, Nala burst out into tears and embraced them. Damayanti could not restrain herself and rushed to him and Nala, unable to contain himself,

disclosed his identity and embraced his wife, as both of them wept.

'But how could you, O Damayanti,' asked Nala, still shedding tears, 'think of remarriage, forgetting your Nala?'

By way of reply Damayanti asked him if he saw any arrangements for marriage in the palace. Further, she called upon the gods to bear witness to her fidelity to Nala during their separation, and a celestial voice proclaimed her innocence and devotion to her husband. And Nala, by repeating the incantation Karkodaka had taught him, regained his original form, and the heavens showered flowers on Nala and Damayanti.

Rituparna, though disappointed to find that there was no remarriage of Damayanti, was delighted to know who his charioteer was, and blessing Nala and Damayanti, went back to his kingdom.

Now, with an army supplied by Bhimaka, Nala and Damayanti went to Nishadha and challenged Pushkara to a gambling contest. Pushkara accepted the challenge and Nala, by the help of the science of numbers he had learnt from Rituparna, easily defeated Pushkara and won back his kingdom. The generous Nala forgave his brother for all the wrongs he had done him, and allowed him to remain in his kingdom and live in peace and affluence.

And Nala and Damayanti reigned together in Nishadha for many, many happy years.

4

SHAKUNTALA

This well known story of Shakuntala appears in the Mahabharata. The original story had a simple plot and was probably based on some element of fact as king Bharata, a historical figure from whom India takes her Sanskrit name Bharatam, was born of Dushyanta and Shakuntala, the principal characters in the story. Kalidasa, for dramatic effect, reconstructed the original plot while retaining the main theme, and the version here given more or less follows Kalidasa's play.

KING VISVAMITRA, who was defeated by the Brahmin sage Vasistha in a war between the two, discovered that the martial might of the Kshatriyas* was inferior to the occult powers enjoyed by the Brahmins, and decided to attain Brahminhood himself. For achieving this end, the great king gave up his crown, repaired to a fearsome forest and started practising severe penances. The spiritual heat produced by the severity of his austerities disturbed the celestials in their kingdom, and Indra, king of the gods, became apprehensive of the intentions of Visvamitra; for according to an ancient covenant between the gods and men, any mortal who was able to perform a hundred sacrifices or practise rigorous penances for years could dethrone

Indra and obtain his throne.

So Indra called Menaka, the gay and vivacious dancer of his court, and asked her to go to the forest where Visvamitra was practising austerities, disturb the meditation of the anchorite by her seductive arts, and bring him back to the ways of the world. And Menaka, ever proud of her looks and skill in the art of seduction, undertook the mission with a light heart, for in the three worlds there was hardly any one — mortal, celestial or demon—who could resist the allure of her lovely body.

The severity of Visvamitra's penances was such that even the beasts of the forest dared not approach the site where he sat practising austerities lest the fiery ascetic scorch them by his look, and the very trees in the neighbourhood stood still for fear of

* The warrior caste among the Hindus, to which the kings also belonged.

his ire. So Menaka, who descended from heaven and arrived at the place where the king was practising austerities, had to abide her time.

One day Menaka found the opportunity she had been looking for. The sage woke up from his trance and went for his ablutions to a stream near by. Menaka now entered the waters of the stream, and started bathing and swimming in sight of the sage. As Visvamitra finished his religious exercises and was walking back, Menaka crossed the sage's path, as if by accident. The royal ascetic, a connoisseur of women before he renounced the world, was struck by the beauty of the fay; her loose, luxuriant, wet hair clung to her buxom

snow-white body and her rich, firm, globular breasts seemed to rebel against the thin and almost transparent brassiere that held them. Visvamitra, master of many women as he was during his royal days had never gazed on such surpassing loveliness in all his life, and the love-god Kama, whom Indra had commissioned for the purpose, showered his flower-shafts on the melting ascetic so that he felt that there were greater things in the world than Brahminhood. In short Visvamitra forgot his vows and fell for the charms of the seductive Menaka. She pretended confusion and outraged modesty at meeting a man, and that only inflamed the sage's royal passion; he asked her who she was and how she came by the stream and Menaka coyly replied that she was a daughter of the woods. And what with one thing leading to another, Visvamitra led Menaka to the place of his penances and lived with her; and the fifty-five years he spent in dalliance with the enchanting Apsara passed off as a day.

Then Menaka became pregnant. On this, the royal sage woke to a sense of his spiritual obligations; he meditated on the Primal Cause that moves the visible world and discovered that Menaka was a dancer sent by Indra to dissipate him. 'What!' exclaimed the raging sage, 'have I, Visvamitra, fallen from my noble purpose and broken my sacred vows by the lures of a vile dancing girl?' And then turning to Menaka he cried: 'Avant, wretched witch, before I scorch you to ashes!' Neither her entreaties nor her threats were of any avail, and the merciless sage drove away the wailing woman.



In her time, Menaka gave birth to a baby girl, and she appeared, holding her baby, before the sage, hoping that pity for the child of his loins would move Visvamitra to accept the babe and her mother. But the relentless sage, determined to pursue his penance till he had gained his end, spurned the fay. And Menaka, equally determined, left the baby near Visvamitra and went to the celestial regions to report to Indra what had happened to her mission.

The resolute Visvamitra refused to look at the baby. He moved to a different place and resumed his austerities, and the helpless child lay crying pitifully where Menaka had left her.

Shortly after Menaka's departure, Kanva, a hermit living in a forest colony near by, happened to pass that way. Seeing the resplendent babe, Kanva picked her up and took her to his hermitage. He named her Shakuntala as he had found her being nursed by Shakunta birds.

Shakuntala grew up among the hermits and their womenfolk, with their fawns and rabbits, peacocks and cuckoos, trees, plants and flowers of the forest, a very child of Nature. She was blessed with the graces of her celestial mother and the intelligence and dignity of her royal father, and she surpassed, in beauty and good manners, all the girls in the place. She was the pet of the hermits, and the leader of the girls who dwelt near Kanva's hermitage. And time, in due course, endowed her with the treasures of her sex, and the young Shakuntala roved the woodlands like a nymph, the very image of her celebrated mother.

It was when Shakuntala was thus growing into glorious womanhood that Dushyanta, king of Hastinapur, went hunting into the forest where the hermits lived. Chasing a fawn, the king strayed far from the main party of hunters and following the trail of the animal, he wandered into the hermitage of Kanva where he saw Shakuntala, in the company of her two friends Anasuya and Priyamvada, watering the flowering plants of the garden. The beauty of the maiden, in the full glow of her youth, like a fresh flower opening out of its bud, charmed Dushyanta. When compared with her innocent, natural loveliness, the charm of the young women of the cities of his great kingdom, the daughters of the princes and nobles whom he had often seen, seemed to the king artificial and dull. The king, enchanted by the frolics of the playful maiden, hid himself behind a shrub, lest his appearance should frighten the girls, and feasted his eyes on the resplendent daughter of the woodlands. 'Shakuntala,' said he to himself, 'is as graceful as a blooming creeper; her lips glow like the tender leaflets, her arms resemble the pliable stalks, and her youthful beauty shines like a blossom, in all her lineaments.'

After watching the girls for some time, Dushyanta quietly walked up to them and started a conversation. The bearing, the pleasing manners and the courteous language of the visitor, soon set at rest the embarrassment experienced by the maidens on meeting a stranger. Dushyanta enquired of the girls the name and lineage of Shakuntala, and was considerably relieved to learn that she was not a Brahmin girl, but the daughter of king Visva-

mitra.* 'Methought,' said he to himself, 'I had chanced upon glowing fire, but I have found a gleaming gem worthy to be borne on my person!'

The girls were naturally curious to know who the visitor was, and Dushyanta, revealed to them his identity and told them the circumstances that had led to his straying into the hermitage. Shakuntala and her companions were delighted to learn that the visitor was the celebrated Dushyanta, king of Hastinapur. The gentle manners of the king and the pretty compliments he paid her, left the girls in no doubt as to his interest in Shakuntala, and Anasuya and Priyamvada let the king monopolise the attention of their friend. After spending some time with the young ladies, Dushyanta took leave of them as he desired to get back to his party, feeling that his men would possibly be getting anxious about his safety, and he promised Shakuntala on parting that he would call again before leaving the forest.

True to his word, Dushyanta came back the next day, and found Shakuntala in the same garden with her two companions. On seeing the king, Anasuya and Priyamvada left their friend; Shakuntala, confused, blushing and protesting, pressed them to stay back, but the mischievous girls assured her that she was in safe company and departed. Old Kanva had gone on a pilgrimage, and there were no men in the hermitage.

Thus, Dushyanta and Shakuntala found themselves alone in the garden. Shakuntala, for the first time in her life, found herself in the company of a handsome young man, and she did not know how to behave herself; but the king, by his easy, courtly manners

gained her confidence and soon the two lovers left the garden and roved the woodlands. The forests resounded with the music of warbling birds and the humming black bees; the trees were in bloom and cool breezes, playing among the plants and creepers, filled the air with the fragrance of flowers. In this idyllic atmosphere the lovers forgot everything except themselves, but when Dushyanta started taking liberties with Shakuntala, she was, though happy, rather frightened as she felt he was overstepping the limits of decency. Dushyanta allayed her fears by the assurance that, for royal clans, Gandharva† was a recognized form of marriage and the two of them were free agents who could consummate their marriage at the altar of the love-god, without anybody's leave. Her qualms of conscience thus lulled, Shakuntala yielded, and the two lovers united themselves in the Gandharva rite in the pleasure groves of Kama.

Eventually the time arrived for Dushyanta to depart from the hermitage and rejoin his party. The thought of separation from Dushyanta was painful to Shakuntala, but he soothed her by many a sweet word and by a solemn promise that on reaching his palace in Hastinapur he would come back to the hermitage with a fitting retinue, take Shakuntala to his palace and instal her as his queen. And as a token of his sincerity and love, Dushyanta

* Marriage between a Brahmin girl and a Kshatriya (caste of kings) was forbidden in ancient India.

† The Gandharva marriage, recognised by Hindu law-givers, was consummation of mutual love in secret by the lovers themselves without formal ceremonies.



took off his signet ring and placed it on Shakuntala's finger.

After the departure of Dushyanta, Shakuntala became depressed and pensive. Her thoughts wandered after her lover or rather husband. The notes of the Koil, the hum of the black bee, the call of the peacock, the zephyr that rustled the leaves, all assumed a new meaning for her, and she could hardly think of anything but Dushyanta and the wonderful time she had with him.

One day, while Shakuntala was sitting in the hermitage lost in thoughts of her lover, the sage Durvasa, notorious in the three worlds for his short temper, paid a courtesy call on Kanva. The latter had not returned from his pilgrimage, and there was nobody inside the hermitage except

Shakuntala. Durvasa, not seeing any one at the entrance, knocked at the door. No one answered. The sage knocked again. Getting no response, Durvasa became impatient and banged the door, with no better result. As the door was apparently bolted from inside, it was clear that there was some one inside the hermitage, and the sage, by his spiritual insight saw that Shakuntala was actually in the hermitage while he was wasting his physical energy on the massive door; he knew too that she was dreaming of a man. The discovery infuriated the irascible sage and he uttered the curse: 'Since this stupid girl made me vainly battle against the door, let the man whom she is thinking of forget her.'

At that moment, Priyamvada and Anasuya came on the scene and heard the curse of the sage. They fell at the feet of Durvasa and implored him to cancel the curse, as Shakuntala was incapable of knowingly offending any one, least of all an honoured guest like Durvasa. The temper of the sage cooled down too, and he felt that he had cursed Shakuntala rather hastily for something which was not actually culpable; but he could not cancel the curse, for potent words once uttered cannot be recalled. So he declared that while Dushyanta had forgotten Shakuntala the moment he uttered the curse, he would regain memory of her if he was shown the ring he had put on the finger of Shakuntala.

As Kanva was not in the hermitage and as he was not expected back early, Durvasa did not stay but went away though Anasuya and Priyamvada invited him to enter the hermitage. They however decided to keep the



matter of the sage's curse a secret from Shakuntala, lest the tender maiden should be upset on hearing that she had caused offence to a great sage by her neglect of the rules of hospitality. Sooner or later, they felt, the king was bound to see the ring and remember his wife, and so they decided not to mention anything about the curse to any one and to watch the progress of events.

Shakuntala spent anxious days and nights expecting the king to come to the hermitage and conduct her to his palace as he had promised, but for obvious reasons, he did not turn up for months.

In due course, the hermit Kanva returned from his pilgrimage, and was told that Dushyanta had visited the hermitage in his absence and married Shakuntala according to the Gandharva rite permissible to Kshatriyas; he approved of the marriage, and felt relieved that Shakuntala had found a husband befitting her position. But it became difficult for Kanva to keep Shakuntala in the hermitage for long; for she was showing visible signs of pregnancy, and the hermit felt that it was time for him to send her to her husband's palace.

The departure of Shakuntala from the hermitage was as painful to herself as to her friends. She had grown up with the trees and plants all around her, and her pet animals and birds, sensing tragedy in the air, clustered round her as she prepared herself for the eventful journey to her husband's palace. The sense of loss was particularly painful to Anasuya and Priyamvada who could not restrain their emotions and burst out into tears. So did poor Shakuntala, torn between

affection for childhood companions and duty towards her husband. Old Kanva, austere ascetic that he was, was also visibly moved, and the very trees and creepers of the hermitage shed their flowers as if in sorrow, while Shakuntala's pet fawn hovered around, unwilling to leave her.

'I leave her to your care,' said Shakuntala to the girls, patting the fawn which clung to her, and wiping away her tears.

'And in whose care do you leave us dear?' asked the girls sobbing.

'Alas! I am a wretch to desert my people!' cried Shakuntala.

'Enough,' said Kanva, trying to be stern; 'Shakuntala has to go.'

Yes, Shakuntala had to go. So they all accepted the inevitable, and started walking away from the hermitage. On reaching the nearest stream, Shakuntala took final farewell of her friends, her foster-father Kanva, of the forest she loved so well, and departed for the city of Hastinapur in the company of the matron Gautami and two male disciples of Kanva whom the hermit had detailed to escort her.

When Priyamvada and Anasuya took final leave of Shakuntala, Anasuya had taken particular care to confide to her departing friend: 'Dear Shakuntala, you know it is a long time since the king had seen you; if perchance, he should not recollect you at sight, remember to show him the ring.'

When Shakuntala with her three elderly companions reached the palace of Dushyanta, the revered visitors were courteously received by the king who enquired of them the object of their visit. On this Sharnagarava, one of the disciples sent by Kanva, told the king that the sage had heard on

his return from his pilgrimage that the king had visited his humble hermitage and married Shakuntala according to the Gandharva rite; Kanva, as the guardian of Shakuntala, approved of the marriage, he assured the king; but finding that he did not come to the hermitage to take Shakuntala home, he had sent her with them to his palace, so that she could live, as was proper, with her husband, especially as she was pregnant and was expecting her baby shortly.

Dushyanta expressed the greatest surprise on hearing this. He swore that he had never seen the hermitage of Kanva nor the lady they had brought with them. On this, Gautami asked Shakuntala to remove her mantle so that the king could see her. Even after Shakuntala had removed her mantle, the king denied ever having seen her.

The fiery Sharnagarava now lost his temper and told the king that Shakuntala was brought up in the guileless and innocent atmosphere of a hermitage and was not in the habit of telling lies like kings who had to deal with all kinds of scoundrels and were skilled in the art of deceit and conceit. On this, the milder hermit Sharadwata pacified his companion, saying that amidst his various preoccupations connected with the affairs of state, the king had probably forgotten his Gandharva marriage, and he asked Shakuntala herself to speak directly to her husband.

Shakuntala, thus pressed, spoke to the king and reminded him of his arrival in the hermitage of Kanva during his hunting expedition and of several endearing incidents that took place during his stay there, but Dush-

yanta still denied all knowledge of these and disowned her. And then she remembered what Anasuya had told her about the ring.

'O king,' she said, 'I shall produce your signet ring which you had given me as a token of your love at the time of your departure from the hermitage.' But looking for the ring, Shakuntala did not find it on her finger. Bewildered, she looked at Gautami. The matron, equally perplexed, said: 'While you poured water on my head in the pool of Sachitirtha, on our way here, you probably dropped it in the pool without noticing the loss.'

'How inventive the sex!' said Dushyanta with a sardonic grin.

Gautami turned sharply to the king and rebuked him for his contemptuous remarks about the female sex: 'We, women, are at any rate better than kings who betray innocent girls whom they are duty bound to protect!'

Shakuntala too, with tears in her eyes, told Dushyanta of the sacred ties of marriage, of a husband's duties to his wife and child, and dwelt at length upon the sin of betrayal of a woman whom he had wed in the Gandharva rite.

'You speak learnedly enough for a girl brought up by hermits,' said the king; 'but how can I accept as my wife a pregnant woman I have not known, nor even seen?'

Sharnagarava now curtly told the king that Kanva's instructions to him were clear; he was to leave Shakuntala in the palace of Dushyanta, her husband. He was going to perform his duty, he said, and had no stomach for arguments. So he called Sharadwata and Gautami, and walked

away from the court. Shakuntala followed them. But seeing her coming after them, even after they had left the palace gates, Sharadwata told Shakuntala: 'Daughter, the duty of a wife is to stay with her husband. So you must remain in Dushyanta's palace, even as a handmaid of his.' The hermits and Gautami now left her and proceeded to the forest.

As poor Shakuntala, rejected by her husband and disowned by her own dear ones, was standing helplessly outside the gate of Dushyanta's palace, Menaka, her mother, who had ever been watching her daughter, descended like a flash of lightning from her heavenly abode and carried her away to the celestial regions.

As luck would have it, the ring that was lost in the pool of Sachitirtha was swallowed by a fish, and the fish was caught by a fisherman. When he cut the fish open, he found the jewelled ring inside, and took it to the fish market to see what it would fetch. When he showed the ring to his customers, they noticed the name of the king engraved on it, and informed the police officer on duty at the place, who arrested the fisherman and took him to the palace with the ring as he disbelieved the fisherman's story and suspected that he had stolen the ring. The fisherman was produced before the king with the ring. On seeing the ring, the memory of his beloved Shakuntala suddenly burst upon Dushyanta; he ordered the release of the fisherman and sent him away with rich presents.

Dushyanta was now stricken with remorse for having discarded his innocent wife, and had a search made for her. Not finding Shakuntala any-

where, the king, depressed and forlorn, neglected his royal duties and spent his days and nights in tortuous thoughts about Shakuntala, wondering where she could be and what could have happened to his child she was carrying.

As Dushyanta was thus living in misery, Matali, the celestial charioteer of Indra, king of the gods, came to him in an aerial car, bearing a message from his master. A brood of ferocious demons, the message said, were warring on the gods and Indra, hard pressed by the demonic hosts, wanted the renowned warrior Dushyanta to come to his aid. The king, only too anxious to help the god, accompanied Matali to the celestial region. Here, the king's skill in arms caused confusion in the ranks of the invading demons, who retreated in disarray.

After thus defeating the demons and winning many laurels from Indra and other celestials, Dushyanta wished to return to his kingdom, and the celestials gave him permission to go back to Hastinapur. So he took leave of the gods and left the court of Indra; but while Matali was driving him to Hastinapur, the king noticed, on the way, the wooded slopes of the celestial hill Sumeru, and wished to alight there to meet certain sages living on the hill.

Wandering on the slopes of Sumeru, Dushyanta was attracted by a beautiful cottage, in the yard of which he noticed a bouncing boy playing with a lion cub, and his nurse trying to stop him, lest he should hurt the cub and the lioness see this and attack him. The lad would not listen to the nurse, but insisted on teasing the cub. Dushyanta was greatly struck by the vigour

and daring of the youngster who seemed to be absolutely fearless of the lioness or for that matter, anything else. Dushyanta approached the boy and fell into conversation with him and his attendant. As they were talking, the youngster, still teasing the cub, happened to drop his amulet, and as the king stooped to pick it up for him, the attendant cried: 'Do not touch the amulet, stranger; it will destroy you.'

But the warning came too late for Dushyanta had already picked it up. The nurse stood as if struck dumb. 'What happens if the amulet is picked up?' asked Dushyanta, mystified. 'Well,' replied the woman when she found speech, 'this magic amulet was presented by a sage to the boy when the sacred rites were performed for him, in order to protect him from all harm; the amulet was charged with potent spells and if any one touches it, except the parent of the boy, it would turn into a serpent and sting the stranger to death!'

And now came from the cottage, wearing the plain clothes of a mourning widow, the lad's mother, the sad Shakuntala!

Shakuntala stood staring at the stranger! Memories of her frustrated life on earth rushed to her mind, and

she stood confused, not knowing whether or not her husband was now prepared to accept her.

The king implored her to forget the past and forgive him. Some evil fate, he explained, had clouded his senses and only the sight of the ring had restored to him the memory of his marriage. 'But ever since I saw the ring,' said Dushyanta, 'I have been living in utter misery, Shakuntala, searching for you, wherever I could send a messenger.' Dushyanta fell at her feet, and she raised him by the hand.

At that moment, the sage Kasyapa from whom no event, past, present or future, was ever hidden, came to the spot. He divulged to the couple how the curse of Durvasa had deprived Dushyanta of his memory which could only be restored by the sight of his signet ring. He declared that Dushyanta had never deviated from the path of duty, ever dear to the race of Puru, and an evil fate alone was responsible for all that had happened.

Shakuntala was now convinced that her husband was innocent, and in happy reconciliation shed tears of joy.

And Dushyanta, with his wife and son, returned to his kingdom and lived happily for many many years.

5

THE STORY OF BHADDA KUNDALAKESHA

From the Theri Gatha or 'Songs of Sainted Sisters.' The Theri Gatha forms part of the Tripitaka or Buddhist Canon compiled in Pali in the third century before Christ, and contains the 'songs' of seventy-three Theris or elderly nuns. While ancient Indian literature generally delights in dwelling on the wickedness and waywardness of women, most of the songs of the Theris deal with the perversity of men.

IN A CERTAIN city there lived, long long ago, a rich merchant who had an only daughter named Bhadda. She was very pretty and every one called her Kundalakesha (Curly Hair) because of her dark, luxuriant, curly hair.

When Kundalakesha came of age, her father wished to have her married to an accomplished young man of wealth, but Kundalakesha loved Sarthaka, son of the family priest, and so she turned down all the proposals her father and relatives brought for her marriage. No one suggested the name of the son of the poor family priest, and Kundalakesha did not deem it proper for her to take the initiative in her own marriage.

As ill luck would have it, Sarthaka was involved in a crime, was arrested,

tried and found guilty. The punishment for the particular crime was death, and Sarthaka was condemned to be publicly executed. He was, accordingly, put in an iron cage and taken in a disgraceful procession through the main streets of the city, his crime and punishment being duly announced at every cross road by beat of drum.

As the procession passed her house, Kundalakesha saw Sarthaka in the cage. The sight of her lover thus publicly disgraced distressed her and she found it too much for her to bear. Only now she knew how much she loved him. Determined to save him at any cost, Kundalakesha went to her father weeping, confessed to him her love for Sarthaka and prayed him to

save the young man; if he were to be executed, she told her father, she would kill herself. On this, the merchant decided to save Sarthaka if it were in his power to do so.

The merchant went to the king with a bag of money to ransom Sarthaka. The king, when he saw that the richest merchant in the city wished to save the life of the condemned prisoner, accepted the ransom, and released Sarthaka.

On seeing Sarthaka, Kundalakesha wept for joy. But when she suggested marriage, her father objected as Sarthaka was, after all, a ransomed criminal; besides, the merchant said, he was known to all as a bad character. But Kundalakesha pleaded on Sarthaka's behalf; he was possibly innocent, she said, and had got himself involved in the case by accident or had fallen into bad company. She would, by her attention and devotion to him, Kundalakesha assured her father, reclaim and reform him if he had really fallen into bad ways. In any case he would have enough money on marrying her, she argued, and once a young man had all that he wanted, there was little chance of his going astray.

'So my dear father,' Kundalakesha pleaded, falling at her father's feet, 'please do as I request you. I cannot live without Sarthaka.'

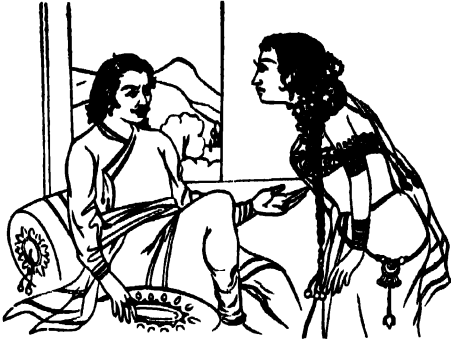
Though the merchant did all that he could to discourage Kundalakesha, she was insistent on marrying Sarthaka and, in the end, the indulgent father agreed, and had her married to the young man of her choice.

After marriage, Kundalakesha discovered that Sarthaka was really involved in the crime for which he was rightly condemned to death, and that

he was keeping bad company. So she did all that lay in her power to bring him to the ways of the good. She took particular care to meet all his needs, real and fancied. She brought for him costly garments, gave him choice viands to eat, and employed men and women servants to attend on him. She engaged musicians and dancers to sing and perform before him. Sarthaka had, in short, all things a young man could wish for. And above all, his wife, the beautiful Kundalakesha, was ever with him, loyal, obedient and solicitous.

Now, near the city in which they lived there stood a shrine on a lonely hill, and one day, Sarthaka said to Kundalakesha: 'You know, my dear wife, when I was condemned to death and was being taken to the place of execution, I had made a vow that if, perchance, I was saved from the jaws of death, I would visit the shrine on the hill and pay my respects to the deity . . . I think it is now time for me to fulfil my vow. So let us go to the shrine together. Husband and wife, as the scripture says, are one and religious devotions are always performed by both together. We cannot delay our pilgrimage to the hill any longer. We will, in fact, start early tomorrow morning. Be careful to put on your finest clothes and adorn yourself with all your jewellery in honour of the deity who saved my life. As becoming good pilgrims, we will walk to the shrine in all humility

Kundalakesha was delighted to hear this. She felt that her prayers to the gods to reform her husband had started to work and he was coming round to the path of the righteous, and she should, apart from anything else, visit the shrine on the hill in gratitude for



this favour of the gods. So she closed in with her husband's proposal and the two decided to start on their pilgrimage by early morning the very next day.

All went well as planned, and Sarthaka and Kundalakesha started walking to the shrine on the hill. There was no one else with them. Soon the pilgrims left the city and its suburbs; the broad road narrowed down to a footpath through rough brambles. By noon they had reached the foot of the hill and started the arduous climb. No human being was in sight and they ascended the barren hill over crags, boulders and ditches. When they reached a fearsome rock overhanging a precipice, Sarthaka looked round and stopped. It was a thoroughly deserted spot.

Sarthaka now suddenly seized Kundalakesha and started strangling her. Kundalakesha screamed and, choking, asked him why he was behaving thus. 'Why, my lord,' she cried, 'what's gone wrong with you?'

'I want to kill you,' he cried with a diabolic expression, 'and take all your jewellery.'

'But, my lord,' she protested wrig-

gling, 'all my jewellery is yours. Take it, by all means, but why do you want to kill me?'

'My hands,' replied Sarthaka, 'are itching for murder. I am fed up of my life with you and must escape to my friends with your jewellery. In case I spare you after taking the ornaments, you might inform the king's officers and get me arrested.'

Kundalakesha pointed out to him that she alone was responsible for saving him from certain death, and she had provided him with everything that he wanted. 'And this is a strange way of repaying an old debt, let alone everything else,' she said.

But neither her entreaties nor her promises could make Sarthaka retract from the dire decision he had taken. He was determined to kill her and nothing, he declared, would stop him from doing just this.

Kundalakesha wondered what stuff men were made of, and what they really wanted of their women. She felt that no woman, however faithful or devoted, could ever satisfy a man. The depth of man's love of variety in wickedness,



Kundalakesha now realised, no woman could ever fathom.

Her love for Sarthaka now turned to hatred and she quickly thought out a plan to destroy him and save herself. Feigning self-surrender, she said: 'My lord, I have no wish to live if you prefer my death, and I shall willingly offer my life to you without your forcing it out of me. But before I die, I have a last wish. Even the king's law grants a last request to a doomed person.... And my last wish is to embrace you and die in your arms.'

This request seemed reasonable to Sarthaka and he was prepared to

grant it. So he released Kundalakesha from his vicious grip and the young woman, assuming a gay expression, slowly led him, by blandishments, to the edge of the precipice, and then advancing, as if to embrace him, kicked him with all her might, so that the villain fell head over heels into the gaping chasm. And in sheer disgust she threw down all her jewellery after him.

Having thus disposed of the wicked Sarthaka, Kundalakesha went back alone to her house, renounced this evil world, joined a convent, and living a saintly life, obtained Nirvana on death.

6

THE SAGE AND THE COURTESAN

From Dandin's Dasa Kumara Charita or 'The Story of Ten Princes.' Dandin lived in the 7th. century of the Christian era and wrote two works : 'The Mirror of Poetry,' in verse, and a prose romance, 'The Story of Ten Princes.' Little else is known about Dandin. Dasa Kumara Charita is one of the earliest prose works in Sanskrit, and Dandin's terse style is noted for its drollery, at times rising to ribaldry. The story opens with the fortunes of Rajahansa, king of Magadha, who, defeated in a war with Malwa, was compelled to live in the woods with his wife and loyal ministers. Here a son, Rajavahana, was born to him. The prince grew up with his companions and received intensive training in the use of arms. When Rajavahana came of age, he decided not only to reclaim his patrimony but conquer the four quarters. So he set out with nine selected companions, all destined to become princes, and came to the forests of the Vindhya mountains. Here they met a wild-looking Brahmin who was living among savages. At the request of the Brahmin, the prince left his companions and went with him to a charmed cave from where the two descended into the wonderful world of Nagas. After a long stay here, Rajavahana returned to the earth.... In the meantime, the nine companions, who knew nothing of the prince's descent into the world of Nagas, set out in search of him, each in a different direction. By the time the prince returned, his companions too, by a happy coincidence, came back after their epic adventures in different lands, and met Rajavahana. On the prince's request, each of the young men narrated his adventures.... The following story was told by prince Apaharavarman who had wandered into Champa, capital of Anga, met the sage Marichi and had, himself, an adventure with the courtesan Kamanjari.

IN A HERMITAGE on the bank of the Ganges, not far from the city of

Champa, capital of Anga, there lived a holy man by name Marichi. He was

proficient in all the sacred sciences; he knew by heart the four Vedas and the six Vedangas and had, through the practice of rigorous penances, attained the eight Siddhis or supernatural faculties.

One day, there came running to his hermitage a young woman, beautiful as Rati, goddess of passion. She was the courtesan Kamamanjari of the city of Champa; she had won fame and wealth by the practice of her trade, and throughout the great kingdom of Anga, she was recognized as the pride of her profession.

Kamamanjari was in obvious distress. Tear drops trickled down the blossoms of her cheeks and fell on her heaving breasts. Her luxuriant wavy hair swept the ground as she bowed before the holy man.

'What ails thee, Kamamanjari?' asked Marichi, full of compassion for the sobbing girl; 'has any one, with evil intent, pursued thee?'

'Holy sage,' said Kamamanjari, 'my many sins are my only tormentors, and I am sorely vexed in spirit. I repent of my wicked life and wish to practise penance, as your slave, in your hermitage. Verily, life in the city is a snare and a delusion, and release from the ocean of misery that is life is the only thing that I now wish for.'

Scarcely had the girl finished speaking these words when a group of her relatives and dependents, headed by her mother, appeared on the scene. Bowing low before Marichi with joined hands, the mother of Kamamanjari thus addressed the sage: 'Revered Sir, my daughter has, perhaps, accused me of misconduct in bringing her up in our traditional

trade. But what wrong have I done, holy Sir, in training her in an occupation ordained for our class from time immemorial? For, the obvious duty of the mother of a courtesan is to give her instruction in the sixty-four arts that please men, to regulate her diet in order to develop in her vigour, beauty and stateliness of form; to tutor her in the art of flirtation, major and minor; to train her up in the exacting science of rhythm, and cultivate in her a taste for music and poetry; and above all, teach her the skilled art of making money out of her lovers.... I have taken pains to give my daughter a thorough, extensive education for the efficient pursuit of her profession, and I can say with pride that I have not failed in my duty towards her. For my daughter is easily the most coveted girl in the city of Champa and we are all living in comfort on her earnings. But of late she has fallen into evil ways. In the company of an impecunious Brahmin, heaven knows from where, she talks of airy things, and when he is gone, sits brooding like a crane on the river side. She has alienated all our solvent customers. For over a month now, all of us, her dependents and relatives, have been reduced to penury and want. For my part, I don't know where my next meal will come from. And when I scolded her, as a dutiful mother ought to, for her want of thought and care for her aged mother, she fell into a temper and ran away to your hermitage.... Pray, Sir, order my daughter to follow her path of duty and save us from destruction. And if you do not, we will all stay here and starve ourselves to death. I have to say nothing more.'

The sage agreed that the duty of a courtesan was the practice of her profession and not piety. He, therefore, asked Kamamanjari to return to her establishment in Champa, resume her business and be a support to her mother, relatives and dependents, who looked to her for their livelihood. 'Besides,' said the sage to Kamamanjari, 'life in the hermitage will be difficult for a young girl like you brought up in the lap of luxury. What is more, Paradise is obtained by people who diligently perform their traditional duties, and short-cuts to salvation are beset with many pitfalls. Gods have fixed a person's path of duty by the caste in which he or she is born. Since you are born and brought up a courtesan, your salvation is in the practice of your traditional trade. So go back, Kamamanjari, to your home, and do not cause any more sorrow or vexation to your beloved mother.'

But Kamamanjari would not agree to this. So convinced in fact was she of the wickedness of her life in the city, and so determined of the need for abandoning it, that she threatened to drown herself in the Ganges if Marichi insisted on her going back to her house.

Seeing the girl's obstinacy, the sage called her mother aside and told her: 'Let Kamamanjari stay in the hermitage for a time. The quarrel between you seems to have thoroughly upset her; I am sure her decision to take to the religious life is a hasty one; there is, however, no point in my arguing with her just now, for she is in no mood to listen to the dictates of reason. But time will cure her of her infatuation with the holy life. Accustomed as she

is to a life of pleasure and ease in the city, the austere and harsh life of the hermitage will soon tire her out. And I assure you, I shall give her daily lessons in duty, and in course of time, I have no doubt, Kamamanjari will return home to you and will, once again, be a support to you all.'

Acting upon the advice of the sage, the old woman and her retinue returned to her house in Champa, leaving Kamamanjari in the hermitage.

To the surprise of Marichi, his fair disciple took to the religious life like a duckling to water. She discarded her jewels and finery, clad herself in simple white clothes, and was ever attentive to the hermit's needs. She cooked food for him, and twice a day swept and cleaned the hermitage. She rose before the hermit and went to bed after he had retired. She watered the trees and plants of the garden, and gathered flowers for the daily rituals of the hermitage. Above all, she dedicated her art to Shiva, the enemy of the love-god Kama, and sang and danced before his idol, to the delight of Marichi. And when after these arduous duties she found time, Kamamanjari sat at the feet of Marichi and listened to him as he discoursed on things concerning the spirit. The sage gave her special lessons on virtue, wealth and pleasure, the triple objects of life, and Kamamanjari proved herself so intelligent and willing a student that within a very short time she gathered remarkable proficiency in sacred lore and could converse with ease not only on the three objects of life but even on Brahman or the Universal Soul. Marichi was greatly impressed by her intellectual powers, spiritual earnestness and re-

lentless pursuit of truth. And the master and the disciple became inseparable, spiritual companions.

One fine evening, after the labours of the day were over, Kamamanjari sat reclining near the sage as he discoursed on the greatness of virtue. During a pause in the discourse, Kamamanjari who had by now learnt all about virtue, said: 'Virtue is supreme in the universe. Men are foolish to pursue wealth and pleasure as the prime objects of life. I should think that even the sage who equated wealth and pleasure with virtue was foolish. For how can wealth or pleasure be equal to virtue?'

It was Spring, the season that animates all creation; the trees and plants of the hermitage were in bloom,

a cool breeze was blowing over the forest, birds were cooing to their mates on the branches of the trees and the Archer was out for sport. Marichi, somehow, was beginning to feel that pleasure and wealth were not so insignificant as his young disciple thought.

'Tell me, my fair disciple,' said the sage, 'what you know of virtue, and how much you rate it above pleasure or wealth.'

'It will be presumptuous on my part to talk to your Holiness on these high things,' replied Kamamanjari promptly, but with a show of modesty; 'but emboldened by that love you bear me, by the noble instruction you have constantly imparted to me, I shall explain what I think of virtue, wealth



and pleasure. The mainspring of wealth and pleasure, methinks, is virtue; for without virtue there can be neither wealth nor pleasure. On the other hand, virtue can stand on its own, independent of wealth and pleasure. And what is most important, once a person has gained virtue, pleasure and wealth do not appear to harm him, even if he indulges in them to satiety. For instance, the god Brahma, armed with virtue, pursued the nymph Tnilothama, and Shiva violated the wives of the hermits; but no blame rests with these gods because of the overriding power of their virtue. Further, Visnnu philandered among gay beauties, sixteen thousand in number, and Prajapati embraced his own daughter; Chandra, the moon-god, abducted Tara, his preceptor's wife; and the handsome Indra seduced Ahalya, Gautama's wife; the sun-god lusted after a mare, Brahaspati lay with Utathya's wife, and the puissant sage Parasara, as you know, deflowered a fishermaid. Such pleasures never injured these great souls, for their spiritual lustre, gained by the practice of virtue, withered away all their sins as a furnace burns away specks of dust and dross. So, virtue, to my mind, has an over-riding effect on wealth and pleasure.'

The young lady languished under the burden of this elevating discourse, and she lay beside the sage in careless abandon with her loose, luxuriant tresses flowing down her supple, symmetrical body. In adjusting her upper garment, the base of her bursting breasts came to the hermit's view, and a negligent movement of the legs exposed her shapely thighs, white and cool as the stem of the plantain tree.

Marichi found emotions, hitherto unknown to him, surging up in his breast and vibrating his whole frame. 'Darling,' said he, caressing Kamamanjari, 'you are truly wonderful. I have never in my long and arduous course of penance, learnt the lore of wealth and pleasure, and it is time that I knew something of these objects of life.'

'In that case,' said Kamamanjari, raising herself on her elbows and laying her head on the hermit's lap, with her arms entwining the body of the saint like a blossoming creeper smothering a young tree, 'listen to me. Wealth is gained by cultivating land and by trading, in peace time and during war, with the attendant condition of sojourn in foreign lands. Wealth is to be earned, increased and spent wisely. Of pleasure, the most delightful is sexual experience. Its fulfilment is in physical union between man and woman in the warm embrace, in that ineffable joy compared with which all else is as nought. It is bliss unutterable, the supreme experience, the sweet fruits of which ever linger in memory. For the sake of love, men sacrifice everything, endure martyrdom, and face with pleasure, the hazards of raging seas, of the wilderness and of inaccessible mountains. It is the one object of life men live for, and those who have not experienced the supreme bliss love affords, are dead as stones.' And Kamamanjari looked longingly into the face of the melting sage; her large, beautiful eyes emitted sparks of passion and the saint, fascinated by her gaze, lost control over himself.

Night was now enveloping the forest, the birds had retired to their nests, and the time for the evening prayers had passed. And Marichi, may be due

to inescapable Fate or the essential weakness of the flesh, forgot his prayers and his vows of celibacy, and led Kamamanjari to a secluded bower in the hermitage for the practice of rituals not entirely spiritual.

The great Marichi was now a mere man, the toy of a harlot. And Kamamanjari, without loss of time, without giving the sage time to think, decided to act quickly; early in the morning, she managed to get a beautiful carriage ready (which, by the way, was ever ready near the hermitage by pre-arrangement, unknown to Marichi) and drove, with Marichi by her side, to her palatial house in Champa where the pair received a warm welcome. And Marichi spent the day and night in the house amidst enchanting young women, like a beatified soul among the fays of Indra's Paradise.

Next day was the festival of the love-god Kama. The city of Champa went gay with song and dance; the streets and parks were watered, strewn with flowers and decorated with festoons of variegated hues. And it was announced by beat of drum that the king himself would patronise the public gaiety by his presence in the royal park with the ladies of the court.

When the gaiety of the festival was at its highest, when singing, dancing crowds thronged the streets and open places, when the king had taken his seat in the royal pavilion in the park, Kamamanjari drove through the city, with the dotard Marichi sitting beside her. The wondering crowd cheered the pair and made way for the chariot which drove straight to the royal pavilion.

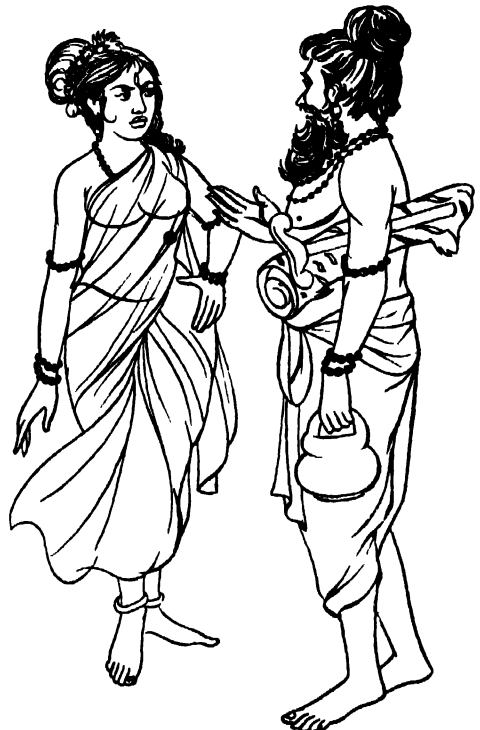
Seeing the great Marichi, the king rose from his seat and asked the queen

to pay homage to the saint. The queen curtsied, and a seat was provided for the sage. As the king and the ladies sat puzzled over this inexplicable visit of the ascetic to the city on the feast of the love-god of all days, a girl of surpassing loveliness stood up from the crowd.

'Your Majesty,' cried the girl, with uplifted hands, addressing the king, 'Kamamanjari has won her bet. From today onwards, I am her slave.'

The king looked at the girl in mystified wonder, and the crowd stood in expectant silence. Thereupon, Kamamanjari turned to the sage Marichi and said: 'I am greatly indebted to you, holy sage, but you may now go back to your hermitage to resume your pious exercise in solitude without distraction.'

'O my Kamamanjari,' said the sage in obvious distress, 'do you intend



sending me back alone to my miserable hermitage? What happened to your protestations of undying love for me?’

‘Revered Sir,’ replied Kamanjari, ‘I am really sorry for you; but my object is achieved. You saw the lady who just now confessed defeat? She is my rival in the trade. Before I came to you, I had an argument with her, in which she said, among other things, that I was talking as if I had

seduced Marichi. Well, I retorted that seducing Marichi was not so big a task as she imagined, and what with one thing leading to another, we laid a wager by which she was to be my slave if I seduced Marichi, but I was to lose my freedom to her if I failed Well, holy Sir, I have won, and I am grateful to you.’

Thus enlightened, Marichi fled to the woods to practise penance for his many sins.

KOVILAN AND KANNAKI

From Silappadikaram or 'The Anklet.' This Tamil classic was written by Elango Adigal, brother of the Chera emperor Senguttavan. According to tradition Elango Adigal renounced the world and became a Jain or Buddhist monk. The date of the author has not been fixed with certainty, but available evidence would indicate that he lived in the first or second century of the Christian era. From very early times South India had been divided into three main kingdoms, Chola, Chera and Pandyan; Elango Adigal, as a background to the main story, gives graphic descriptions of the three kingdoms and their people. Puhar, the capital of the Cholas, Madura, the capital of the Pandyans, and Vanchi, the capital of the Cheras receive special treatment, on account of which the book is divided into three sections, Puhar Kandam, Madura Kandam and Vanchi Kandam. All this makes Silappadikaram a book of considerable historical value; its literary merit is esteemed high, and next to Kural, Silappadikaram is reckoned the most important classic in Tamil.

IN THE FAMED city of Puhar, the capital of the Cholas, there lived a merchant by name Kovilan. In wealth he excelled Kubera,* in looks the love-god Kama, and in generosity king Bali himself. In due time he married Kannaki according to the rules of his caste, and the two lived together happily in Puhar like Shiva and Parvati in Kailas, like Vishnu and Lakshmi in the Milk Ocean. Kannaki, fair as a water-lily and virtuous as Arundhati,† was ever devoted to her husband and did

all that was in her power to please him in every way.

Now in Puhar was brought up the courtesan Mataki. As befitting her profession, from the age of five she had been trained in the sixty-four arts and in all the dances of the country, ritual and popular. When she came of age, Mataki gave her maiden performance

* Kubera is the god of wealth.

† In Hindu mythology, Arundhati, wife of the sage Vasishtha, is the paragon of constancy.

before the Chola king. The king, the nobles and the distinguished citizens who witnessed the performance were struck by the beauty and skill of the young dancer, and all the spectators, and Kovilan more than all, showered gifts on the accomplished dancer. And as she bowed before the king for leave to depart, he presented her with a necklace of precious stones weighing one thousand coins.

As was the custom of the age, the very next day, an old and faithful maid-servant of Mataki's establishment took the necklace the king had presented to Mataki, and went to the city to choose a lover for the courtesan. On reaching the great market of Puhar where merchants of many lands, owners of ships, traders in foreign goods, and nobles of

the realm came to buy and sell, the bawd announced by beat of drum that Mataki would accept as her lover the highest bidder for the necklace. Many wealthy men, attracted by Mataki's beauty and accomplishments bid in the auction but Kovilan outbid the rest and became the permanent lover of Mataki.

Kovilan now practically lived in Mataki's palatial establishment. He went with her and her companions on picnics, to the seaside and to the woodlands, drove with her in chariots to public parks and pleasure groves, and the enchanting courtesan held him by her many arts bound to her. He forgot his dear devoted wife Kannaki, and neglected his business. Mataki's slightest wish was law to the infatuated Kovilan. He spent lavishly to satisfy





her whims, and soon his fortune ran out.

Kannaki was grieved at the turn of events but as she was a high-born lady trained from childhood in the duties of a noble wife, she never showed by word or deed her grief, but always appeared cheerful and pleasant whenever Kovilan happened to visit her. She could only put down Kovilan's estrangement from her to her own misdeeds done in former lives.

Eventually Kovilan's fortune was spent in the service of Matakai. The ways of wayward women with their impoverished lovers are well known the world over, and quarrels broke out between Kovilan and Matakai. He suspected that the courtesan was developing interest in other men, that she was more fond of his money than of himself, and what with one thing and another and his inability to keep her in affluence, Kovilan, the richest merchant of Puhar, had to leave the house of Matakai and return to Kannaki, penniless and frustrated.

Kannaki received her husband with open arms, and comforted him by many a sweet word; she even felt that Kovilan's loss of wealth was a bless-

ing in disguise since it had united her to her beloved husband once again.

Kovilan, however, did not wish to stay in Puhar as people looked down upon him, and he decided to leave the city. Kannaki too agreed with the proposal; her own personal ornaments were worth a fortune and by selling them, she pointed out, it would be possible for them to start some new business in a far off place and retrieve their losses. And they thought that Madura, the capital of the Pandyan kingdom, would be a fit place to start their new venture. So Kovilan and Kannaki sold what little property was left in Puhar, took leave of their relatives and friends and left the city for distant Madura.

The pair travelled with a nun by name Kavunti Adigal. On the way to Madura they visited many temples and shrines, and met different kinds of persons: peasants and jungle dwellers, fowlers and hunters, ferocious Maravas who lived by plunder and loot, and nomads who wandered from place to place. They passed through cities with beautiful palaces, temples and Viharas, and eventually crossed the borders of the Chola kingdom. Reaching the un-



familiar Pandyan land, they asked or wayfarers the road to Madura and at last reached the suburbs of the great city. Here Kavunti Adigal asked Kovilan and Kannaki to stay with cowherds who supplied milk to the city. Tending cows and living by the sale of milk and curds, Adigal told them, were the noblest of occupations, and cowherds were honest, upright people in whom there was no guile. Kovilan and Kannaki accepted her proposal and took up their residence in the settlement of the pasture folk, and Kavunti Adigal left them there.

Kovilan and Kannaki loved their new way of life. The simple life of the cowherds and the milkmaids was a welcome change from the hectic luxurious life of Puhar. The song and dance of the milkmaids, the lowing kine and the bleating calves, the notes of the flutes of the cow-boys, the green pastures and the winding streams, all filled the pair with a sense of peace and joy they had never felt before, and Kovilan and Kannaki lived among the cowherds like Krishna and Radha of old in the groves of Vrindavan on the banks of the Yamuna.

And then one day Kannaki told her husband: 'I think the time is now opportune to start our new venture. The money we have brought with us is nearly spent. Hence I suggest that you take one of my anklets and sell it in the jewellery market of Madura. As you know it was given to me by my father at the time of our marriage; it is made of gold with its globular bells filled with diamonds. I am sure the anklet will fetch a good price in Madura as the merchants in the city can very well appreciate its worth.'

Kovilan was grieved by the thought

of parting with the anklet of Kannaki, but as it was the only way by which he could retrieve his lost fortune, he decided to sell it. Besides, he comforted himself, he would soon be in a position, by building up a business, to have another anklet of the same size and pattern made, and present it to Kannaki.

As Kovilan left his house with Kannaki's anklet, a bull crossed his path, but born and brought up in a city as a trader, he did not know, as did the cowherds, that this was an ill omen, and proceeded to the city of Madura. Kovilan took the anklet to the jewellery market of Madura where wealthy merchants had their shops and show-rooms. As he was walking along the street, admiring the worth and workmanship of ornaments and precious stones displayed in the shop windows, he noticed a prosperous looking individual in a silk robe, well adorned with costly ornaments, walking majestically, holding a walking stick of gold. Thinking the man was a wealthy broker in jewellery, Kovilan approached him, showed him the anklet and asked him what it was likely to fetch in the market of Madura.

The man looked at Kovilan and examined the anklet. 'You seem to be a stranger to this place,' said the man.

'Yes, I am,' replied Kovilan. 'I come from the Chola country.' Not wishing to disclose his identity, as Kovilan's name was possibly known in Madura, he did not mention Puhar or his own name.

'Well,' said the man, 'this indeed is an anklet worthy to be worn by the queen. For your information I may say that I am the royal goldsmith, and it is my business to buy the best jewel-

lery and precious stones in the market for the king and his ladies. So come with me; I shall show the anklet to the queen, and if she approves of it, you will be paid any reasonable amount you ask for it.'

Kovilan was happy to hear this and followed the goldsmith. As they came near the gate of the palace, the goldsmith asked Kovilan to wait in a place near by, and went inside.

Now this goldsmith was a very wicked man and a thief. He had stolen one of the anklets of the queen, had spread a report that some burglar had broken into the queen's apartments at night and bolted with it, and was pretending to look high and low for the thief. Gold anklets were usually of a set pattern with globular bells and pearls inside for jingling, and the anklet Kovilan showed looked very much like the stolen one and an idea flashed in the goldsmith's mind. He walked into the palace but did not go to the queen; instead he sought an audience with the king and showed him the anklet and asserted it was the queen's.

'I found the thief in the market place,' said the perfidious scoundrel; 'he was trying to sell the anklet and I have managed to lure him to the palace gate. Pray, order the guards to arrest and punish the thief.'

On hearing this the king, without making any further enquiries, without even seeing and questioning the alleged thief, gave orders to the palace guards to seize the man and behead him! This indeed was strange, for the Pandyan king was famous throughout the three kingdoms for his strict adherence to the principles of justice and for his concern for the

people. But who can resist Fate or the working of Karma?

The villainous goldsmith led the guards to the place where Kovilan was waiting and had him seized. The guards were apprehensive of some mistake; for all the signs of nobility were clearly visible on Kovilan's face and limbs and none of the criminal or low born. But the cunning goldsmith, by telling clever stories about the subterfuge of thieves, their skill in deception and their proficiency in the black arts, managed to convince the guards that Kovilan was an arch-thief who hid an evil mind in a respectable exterior. 'It is the business of the successful thief,' the goldsmith said, 'not to look like a thief.' Thus coaxed, the guards beheaded Kovilan.

News spread like wild fire in the city that the thief who had stolen the queen's anklet had been caught and beheaded. This thief, the people said, was a foreigner and no one knew whence he came, and there was not even a claimant for the body. As the citizens of Madura were thus talking, Kannaki, who was waiting for the return of her husband, was becoming apprehensive. And then some cowherds happened to see the body of Kovilan, and the fateful news reached her.

Like an infuriated lioness chasing the hunter who has killed her mate, Kannaki rushed forth from her house, flying with the speed of wind, and reaching the palace of the Pandyan king rang the Bell of Justice.* The

* Ancient kings had a Bell of Justice hung in a hall near the palace to which all had access. An aggrieved person could ring the bell and demand an audience with the king if his or her case was urgent and important.

resounding noise shook the entire city. The sceptre of the Pandyan king bent,* and an unknown terror seized him. The sentinel reported the arrival at the Hall of Justice of a woman with wild looks and dishevelled hair, the very goddess of fury incarnate. The king asked the sentinel to bring her to him immediately.

'Are you a king or a murderer?' asked Kannaki, staring at the king.

The Pandyan king who had never known fear in his life was stricken with terror. 'Who are you?' he asked.

'I am Kannaki, the devoted wife of Kovilan, the noblest merchant in Puhar, the city of the Chola king who had given his own flesh to a bird to meet the demands of justice,' said Kannaki;† 'misfortune drove us to your miserable country, and you have killed my husband without cause. My vengeance, the vengeance of a devoted wife, will reduce your city to ashes!'

The king now recovered his senses and related the complainant to the man whose execution he had ordered. 'But your husband was a thief,' he said; 'he had stolen my wife's anklet and has been rightly punished for his misdeed.'

* When there was a miscarriage of justice in the kingdom, the sceptre of the king was believed to bend itself.

† According to a legend, while the founder of the Chola dynasty was one day sitting on his throne, a pigeon, chased by a hawk, flew into the king's lap for protection. As he stopped the hawk, this bird claimed the pigeon as its legitimate prey and maintained that in depriving it of its food the king was committing a mortal sin. The frightened pigeon, on the other hand, pleaded that it was the duty of every righteous king to protect the weak against the strong, and if he gave up the supplicant he would be committing a mortal sin. In this predicament the Chola king is said to have cut his own flesh and offered it to the hawk and thus saved the pigeon's life.

'Thief? O king! My husband was no thief. He was the son of the merchant prince Machathu, famed in the three kingdoms for his wealth and generosity. The anklet he took to the market is not your wife's, but his wife's, and hence his own.' 'Look, king,' she said, pulling off the anklet she was wearing and flinging it before the king, 'have a good look. This is the other anklet of the pair. The queen's anklet must be having pearls inside, but mine has diamonds.'

The king now had a careful look at the anklet and saw what Kannaki said was the terrible truth. 'I am undone,' he cried in agony. 'I have condemned an innocent man to death!' Struck by remorse, as if by lightning, he fell down unconscious, and died on the spot. Soon the queen came on the scene, hugged the corpse and unable to bear the loss of her husband fell down dead too.

The ire of Kannaki was not stayed by the death of the Pandyan king and the queen. She rushed forth from the palace, lamenting and mutilating herself. As she called upon the god of fire to consume the wicked city, from her bleeding breasts burst forth a raging fire. Every street she fled through was set on fire and soon the entire city of Madura was in flames. After thus reducing the city to ashes in which the wicked goldsmith, the thoughtless king and many others were buried, Kannaki fled from the kingdom of the Pandyas and, crossing its borders, entered the Chera country. Here the ire of Kannaki was stayed. But she had now no interest in life and wished only to be united with her husband. And so she ascended a high hill and started praying to the gods

when a celestial voice was heard granting her prayer: 'Kovilan cannot join you, but you will be taken to him.' And then as the hill tribes inhabiting the region were watching, a car descended from the clouds with Kovilan in it, and Kannaki was carried away to the celestial regions!

The tribesmen who saw this wonder reported it to the Chera king Senguttavan, and he had a shrine built in honour of the great Kannaki, and her worship was instituted therein. The fame of Kannaki spread far and wide,

and shrines in her honour arose in the Chera, Pandyan and Chola kingdoms and even in distant Lanka.

(In the sequel, we are told that the successor of the dead Pandyan king sacrificed one thousand goldsmiths to Kannaki in expiation of the crime of the royal goldsmith, and then had the city of Madura rebuilt. Kannaki is worshipped in the South as the goddess of chastity and wifely devotion).

8

THE PRINCE AND THE OILMONGER'S DAUGHTER

From Tales of Prince Madanakama. Several versions of these tales, of obscure origin, are current in South India, and some are even found in the Katha Sarit Sagara in slightly different forms. Like many Eastern tales, the stories of Madanakama started their wandering career from a bedroom in a palace. Prince Madanakama, so goes the story, was falsely accused of having ravished his preceptor's daughter, and the king, his father, without making proper enquiries, ordered him to be executed. But by the help of the queen, Madanakama managed to escape and he fled the kingdom in the company of his playmate Satyakirti, the minister's son. The two young men, in their wanderings, happened to visit a dilapidated temple where prince Madanakama saw a mural of two beautiful ladies and fell madly in love with the unknown originals. Refusing food and drink, the prince pined for the girls, and Satyakirti restored him to health and good cheer by swearing that he would find the originals of the mural and bring them to the prince. Leaving the prince with an innkeeper in a city, Satyakirti started on his epic quest, and eventually found the girls. They were the daughters of a king who thought so highly of them that any suitor who asked for them in marriage was promptly beheaded. By a special boon of Shiva, Satyakirti found favour with the king, and managed to marry the princesses by a fake rite, which was no proper wedding ceremony, as he wanted them to be married to prince Madanakama; when the princesses came at night for their conjugal rights, Satyakirti started telling them interesting stories; he thus put them off for twelve nights, but on the thirteenth the princesses said that they had had enough of stories, and were insistent on having more material pleasures. Satyakirti was thus obliged to tell them who he was and how he had obtained them for marriage to Madanakama. With the king's permission he took them to Madanakama who married one of them; the other was married to Satyakirti. Madanakama then returned to his kingdom, proved his innocence, and was taken back, into the king's favour. For Katha Sarit Sagara, see the introductory note to story 11.

The following story was told by Satyakirti on the twelfth night

ONCE UPON A TIME, there reigned in the kingdom of Magadha, a just and powerful king and he had a son named Uddalaka. The young prince was brave and handsome, and hunting was his favourite sport.

One day, while the prince was returning on horseback from a hunt in a forest, he came to a village where he saw a beautiful maid drying sesame in the sun. More than the beauty and the captivating features of the village belle, it was a certain defiance in her look and bearing that interested the prince. He felt like teasing the girl, and so asked her: 'Born in sesame and brought up on its oil, can you

tell me, pretty maid, what flower is smaller than the sesame?'

The girl took this as a mean jest about her low birth in an oilmonger's family, and retorted: 'Born of a flower and brought up on its honey, can you tell me, O rider, what flower has two petals?'

Uddalaka thought it impertinent on the part of an oilmonger's daughter to talk to the crown prince of the realm in this manner. He certainly knew the answer to the girl's question, for the eye is universally reckoned a lotus with two petals, but he disdained to reply to the girl. 'To whom are you married,' he asked instead.



'What woman with self-respect would care to marry and be the slave of a man?' She wished to know.

All this was leading nowhere, and the prince thought that the behaviour of the girl was going beyond the limits of rustic ignorance. Perhaps she did not know who he was. 'Do you know whom you are talking to?' he asked bluntly and rather haughtily.

'If I am not mistaken,' replied the girl, 'I am talking to the crown prince of Magadha, the dread of the rats and rabbits of the woods.'

The prince became furious. 'This is treason,' he shouted; 'and you shall be punished for it. You say you will marry no man; but rest assured, I will marry you and, what is more, on the wedding day itself shall confine you in a dungeon, and you shall perish there.'

'You rate yourself very high, Your Highness,' said the girl calmly; 'but if ever you marry me, and denying me conjugal rights, consign me to a dungeon, rest assured I will get a bouncing son by you who will horse-whip you and teach you good manners!'

The prince could hardly breathe for rage and rode off. Reaching the palace, he immediately sought his father and expressed a wish to marry the oilmonger's daughter. The prince was already married to several young women of high birth, and the king pointed out to him the undesirability of bringing disgrace on his royal house by marrying an oilman's daughter. But the stubborn prince persisted in his demand and even threatened to leave home and parents and take to oil-mongering in order to marry the girl! Thus pressed, the king agreed to Uddalaka's proposal.

When the royal messengers, bearing

presents, came to the oilmonger with the marriage proposal, the man who had known nothing of what had happened between the prince and his daughter, leapt for joy and informed the girl about it. She, however, showed neither pleasure nor displeasure but asked her father to accept the proposal.

In due course the girl was married to the prince and taken to the palace; but before she left her home she told her father all that had happened and asked him not to grieve for her as she was quite capable of taking care of herself. But she instructed him to make secret enquiries to find out where she would be kept imprisoned in case the prince carried out his threat, and dig an underground passage between the dungeon and his house so that she could get access to him unknown to others.

The prince proved true to his word. When the girl, after her wedding, was taken to her nuptial chamber, he ordered his trusted minions to seize her and had her imprisoned in a two-room dungeon. Her room was practically sealed off, and a maidservant from the adjoining room served her meals through a slit in the wall. None but this servant girl was allowed to have any conversation with her, and even this girl could talk only through the hole in the wall.

The prince, what with his many wives and pleasures of the hunt, soon forgot his oilmonger wife and lived as if she did not exist.

The oilmonger, who had kept himself well-informed about all that was happening to his daughter, had the tunnel dug, and the girl visited her father as often as she pleased, though she took the precaution of remaining

indoors and not letting her neighbours know about her visits. Nor did the maidservant detailed to attend on her know anything about it, as the prisoner visited her father only at night when she was supposed to be sleeping.

When the oilmonger's daughter felt that sufficient time had elapsed for the prince to forget her completely, she decided to put her plans into execution. First she asked her father to get her a renowned teacher of dancing; when one was procured, she took him into her confidence and learnt singing and dancing. She spared no pains in mastering the intricate art of dancing, especially those seductive poses and guileful gestures that fascinate men. In course of time, she acquired perfection in dancing, and her teacher himself declared that he had never seen or trained so accomplished a dancer.

The dancer now requested her teacher to ask for a performance in the court where he was to introduce her as his daughter. The teacher felt proud of the suggestion, and a performance in the palace was duly arranged.

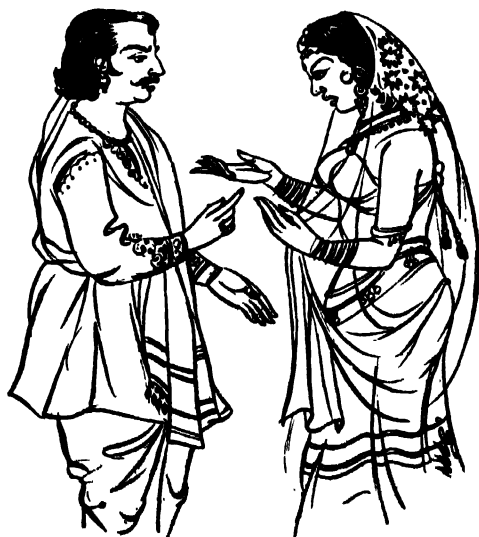
The dance in the palace was a great success. The grace and rhythm of the dancer captivated the audience. The lightly-clad girl took care to display the wonderful symmetry of her form to the best advantage as she sailed past the prince, and the prince could hardly contain himself; for he was a great lover of dancing.

As soon as the dancer had finished her performance and retired to her establishment, the expected happened. A trusted messenger of the prince came to the dancing-master, complimented him on the wonderful performance of his daughter and informed him that the prince would be pleased to visit the

lady that very night. The dancing-master set a very high price on his daughter, but the prince was prepared to barter away his kingdom for the pleasure of a night with the enchanting dancer, and so did not care to haggle.

Punctually at sundown prince Uddalaka came. The dancer, dressed to kill, came coyly to him, her face half-veiled. Dim lights and heady drinks further prevented recognition, if at all recognition was possible, and the prince had a night with the dancer the like of which he had never had in his life before; in fact, it was with difficulty that he could tear himself away from the lovely, voluptuous, fascinating, beauty in the small hours of the morning.

In due course the oilmonger's daughter conceived. As she was nearing full term, she told her maidservant that she intended to shut herself up in her room in order to enter into a trance lasting for months; she had



been secretly practising Yoga, she said, and had obtained such proficiency in the science that she could live merely on air. After giving strict instructions to the servant girl not to disturb her in her Samadhi and pronouncing a curse on her if she would, the oilmonger's daughter went to her father's house and lived there in comfort, well looked after by her mother.

In her time she gave birth to a son. He was born at an auspicious hour, and on his person were all the mystic marks of royalty. Ten days after the birth of her son, she gave him into the care of her parents, returned to her dungeon, told the servant girl that her trance was over, and lived in her cell as before.

The oilmonger and his wife reared their grandson with the greatest care; he grew into a fine boy and became the leader of the youngsters of the village in the rustic games they played. The oilmonger named his grandson Tilakan.

One day, while he was playing in a village lane, Tilakan happened to offend one of his playmates who called him a bastard and asked him, if he were not, to tell him who his father was. Tilakan, no doubt, severely punished the truculent boy but his remarks set him thinking, and he immediately went home and asked his grandparents who his father and mother were. On this, the old oilmonger assured him that they were both alive and well. He then took his grandson to the doorway that opened into the underground passage and told him: 'Go by this passage, my boy, and you will reach a prison cell where you will find a lady; she will tell you all about your parents.'

As directed by his grandfather, Tilakan went through the dreary passage and reached the dungeon. His mother was delighted to see him. On the boy's enquiring about his parentage, she narrated to him the story of her life and of the cruel treatment she had all along received from her husband, his father; as she told him the sorry tale, the poor woman wept and embraced her son. 'You are a prince, my son,' she said kissing him, 'and you must claim your heritage as soon as you come of age.'

'Mother, dear,' Tilakan consoled her, 'do not weep; I do not care for my heritage, but from now on my only thought will be to avenge your wrongs. And I hope, next time we meet, you will be not only a free woman but a queen enjoying all the honours due to your rank!'

The mother blessed her son, wished him the guidance and aid of the gods in all that he undertook, and sent him back home.

Reaching home, Tilakan told his grandfather that he had learnt all about his parents and he would not rest till his imprisoned mother was released, and his father made to repent of his cruelty. So, with the permission of his grandparents, Tilakan travelled to a far country where lived a famous teacher who trained young men in the use of weapons and in the conjuror's art. He took up a position as apprentice to this teacher, and in course of time learnt to use all the weapons of war, and acquired skill in sleight of hand and in other arts that delude men's senses. When he felt he was able to do the job he had in view, Tilakan took leave of his teacher and returned to Magadha. On the way, he success-

fully tried a few tricks he had learnt, and procured all the money and equipment he needed.

In Magadha he rented a house near the palace, and from this house he watched and studied the layout of the buildings of the palace, the height of the boundary walls, the rooms the prince used, the exit and entrance to the palace, the sentinels who guarded them and all other details he wished to know.

Then one dark night Tilakan stole into the bedroom of the prince and his favourite wife. After making sure that both were fast asleep, he managed to remove the prince's signet ring from his finger and his wife's jewellery from her body without waking up either of them; after this, he picked up what he could conveniently lay hold of in the room and bolted away without leaving the slightest trace behind.

In the morning when prince Uddalaka woke up he found his signet ring missing and his wife discovered that she had lost all her jewellery. A search was made, when it was found that many other things were also lost, and it became clear that a burglar had got into the palace at night. The prince reported the matter to his father, and the king, blazing with rage, ordered the Chief of his police force to investigate the matter immediately and catch the thief that very night. In a country, the king pointed out to the police officer, where such audacious robbery could take place in the palace itself, no citizen's home would be safe.

The news of the burglary in the palace and the king's order spread far and wide, and wherever two persons met, the chief topic of conversation was the theft of the prince's signet ring. Tila-

kan himself, no need to say, kept his ears wide open for news; when he went to the market place in the city, he picked up from street gossip, some interesting details about the police Chief and his relatives. He came to know that the Chief had a nephew who had gone on a pilgrimage to Benaras long ago; the young man had not been heard of since then and was taken for dead. The Chief, Tilakan was told, was very fond of this nephew of his and loved him like his own son, as the young fellow had been orphaned in childhood and was living in the Chief's house.

In the evening of the day on which the palace was burgled, a young pilgrim in saffron clothes, holding a staff and bowl, came to the house of the police Chief. On meeting the Chief, the pilgrim fell at his feet, begged pardon for leaving him and going to Benaras and not letting him know anything about him for so long; he had heard a call from Lord Shiva, the pilgrim said, and forgetting everything, had gone on the trail of the divine voice to Benaras; he had learnt at the feet of many masters, had attained quietude of mind, and now wished to pay a visit to his old home and his beloved uncle. The Chief was delighted to meet his nephew whom he had taken for dead, and embraced him warmly; his nephew had changed much, he remarked, but his features remained essentially the same. The pilgrim regaled his uncle with many tales of his adventures in strange lands and of the wonderful places of pilgrimage he had visited. The young night advanced under this enchanting conversation, and only an interruption from his men could remind the police Chief of the king's

order to hunt the thief that night.

The Chief now informed his nephew of the theft in the palace and his determination to catch the thief that very night, and told him that he was compelled to leave him just then but would meet him again next morning. 'In that case, uncle,' said the pilgrim, 'I think I should accompany you. I am an adept in Yoga and can see through many deceptions; perchance I may be of help to you in tracking down the robber.'

The Chief thanked his nephew for the offer and the two decided to go together. They sent the police party ahead to an appointed place and promised to join it later.

As soon as the party had departed, uncle and nephew ate their meal, and started on their quest for the thief. Before leaving the house, the Chief took the precaution of arming himself with a couple of handcuffs to be used in case the thief was caught on the way. His nephew showed interest in the gadget; he had never seen one, he said, and offered to carry the handcuffs for his uncle.

As uncle and nephew were walking quietly by moonlight, they happened to pass a lonely spot, when the nephew asked the uncle how a handcuff was used. The Chief was very good at instruction and demonstration, and told his nephew how the cuffs were clamped on the wrists; when he felt that the young man had grasped his instructions well, he showed his hands behind his back and asked his nephew to fix the cuffs to his wrists, as instructed, which was speedily and efficiently done! The nephew then suddenly took out the rags and a chain he had been hiding under his robe, gagged his un-

cle and tied him to a nearby tree.

After this he hurried to the Chief's house and told his 'aunt' that they had fallen into an ambush set by the thieves, that his uncle was caught and tied up to a tree and that he had escaped through the power of his Yoga which enabled him to dart through space; the thieves were marching on the Chief's house with the intention of raiding it, he added, and asked the bewildered woman to give him all the ornaments for safe custody, and go into hiding. The woman was left no time for thought; after surrendering her jewellery to the pilgrim, she went into hiding for fear of her life, and her supposed nephew, who was none other than Tilakan, as the reader must have rightly guessed by now, disappeared with the jewellery.

Next morning when the police Chief, who had gone to catch the thief, was himself found handcuffed, gagged and chained to a tree on the roadside, people could hardly help laughing. In the palace, however, the incident was viewed with grave concern, as there was no knowing what the audacious thief would be up to next. So prince Uddalaka himself, with the permission of his father, decided to make an attempt to catch the thief that night.

The prince accordingly gave elaborate instructions to the police and the palace guards to patrol every street and lane and comb the city for any suspicious characters. And he himself with a picked body of men went out at nightfall to see that his orders were carried out and that there was not a nook or corner of the city that was left unguarded.

Though all efforts were thus made to

track down the malefactor, no report of any guards having taken even a vagrant reached the prince till midnight; but Uddalaka was determined not to spare his men or himself and continued the search with relentless vigour. And as the prince and his party were proceeding to the suburbs of the city to make sure that the thieves were not hiding there, they noticed a flickering light on a barren hill that rose a couple of miles away from the city. The prince decided to find out who was keeping vigil on the lonely hill at that time of the night, as he knew the hill to be uninhabited.

Uddalaka and his men gained the foot of the hill, and then quietly climbed up when they noticed a sturdy young man in an improvised tent sitting by the side of a lamp in apparent expectation of something. They surprised him and the young man, visibly frightened, took to flight. The prince's men caught and questioned him. At first he gave evasive replies but under threat of severe punishment, confessed that he was a merchant who traded by night, and was waiting for a party of thieves who had promised him good business late that night.

Now the prince decided to use him, and promised him wealth and honours if he would help him to get the thieves arrested, and threatened to hang him for abetting robbery, if he would not. On this the man agreed to trap the thieves for the prince. 'For this,' he said, 'it is necessary that your men should hide somewhere sufficiently far away, preferably at the foot of the hill; if the thieves see a crowd here, they will very naturally become suspicious. So we two can remain in the tent; the others must retire.'

The prince could very well appreciate this, and asked his men to move away from the tent and hide themselves in different places at the foot of the hill and come up only when he sounded his whistle. After the men had dispersed, the prince and the merchant began their vigil in the tent.

The merchant who looked out constantly for lights, whispered to the prince: 'I think the thieves are on the way, for I can see a light in the distance. If they find the two of us in the tent, I am afraid they may not come in. So, I pray Your Highness, you must remove your royal robes, and get into that sack in the corner of the tent. From there you can hear my conversation with the thieves; and as they sit here, I will go out on some pretext and sound the whistle when your men will come and surround the tent.'

The prince felt that this was a good idea, and he immediately removed his robes, tied them into a bundle, gave the whistle to the merchant and got into the sack. On this, the merchant closed the mouth of the sack with strong cords, put on the robes of the prince, and raised the alarm by sounding the whistle. All the prince's men now rushed to the tent, and the young man in royal robes, who looked very much like the prince, ordered four strong men to carry the sack which, he said, contained the thief. From inside the sack the prince cried out that he was not the thief, but was whipped mercilessly for being obstreperous; for what with the man resembling the prince, and the general confusion and the darkness, no one could see through the disguise of the merchant; further, the king's men, who had extensive dealings with criminals,

knew well enough that a thief who confessed to robbery without being tortured, was yet to be born.

It was noised abroad that the prince had caught the thief, and by the time the police party had reached the palace, a cheering crowd thronged the gate. The king himself, even without attending to his morning ablutions, came to see the thief who had caused such widespread dismay in the city. Presenting the sack to the king, the man in the prince's robe told him how he had caught the robber and sewn him up in the sack. Then he horse-whipped the sack and the man inside cried that he was not the thief; on which, the king, considerably annoyed at the mendacity of the marauder, gave the wriggling sack a nasty kick with the royal boots, which effectively silenced the contents!

By the king's order the sack was opened, when out of it emerged the crown prince of Magadha, his face and body bruised almost out of recognition. The king and all the men looked at the prince and the stranger in the robes of the prince, and all

were struck by the remarkable resemblance between the two.

'Who are you, young man?' asked the king of the youth who stood proudly before him in his son's robes.

'Your Majesty,' calmly replied the young man, 'there is a lady living in a dungeon in the crown prince's harem. Pray send for her, and she will tell you who I am and why I am here.'

The king ordered his men to release the lady and bring her immediately before him.

When the oilmonger's daughter came, the young man fell at her feet and said: 'Mother, dear, I have today fulfilled my promise made to you. The crown prince, your husband and my father, has been chastened for his cruelty to you.'

The oilmonger's daughter now told the king in detail all that had happened. The king ordered her to be released and recognized as the chief wife of his son, who now repented of his folly and accepted the oilmonger's daughter as his lawful wife and her son, as his rightful heir.

9

THE FOOLISH CARPENTER AND HIS GAY WIFE

From the Panchatantra. The beast tales of India, known as the Panchatantra or 'Five Principles of Statecraft; have their basis in the Jataka Tales (see story 12), but unlike the Jatakas are secular in character. The tales are ascribed to a Brahmin who undertook to teach the lazy sons of a king, who hated their regular studies, the science of polity by means of the story.... As mentioned in the Introduction, translations and versions of the Panchatantra had appeared in Arabic and in European languages in the Middle Ages. The date of the Panchatantra in its present form is uncertain, though certain scholars put it down to the first century of the Christian era. Some of the stories are, however, as old as the Indian civilisation though not collected and presented in book form earlier.

ONCE UPON A TIME, there lived in a certain city, a carpenter whose wife was a gay woman. Her loose life was the talk of the town and rumours of her many affairs with men at last reached the ears of the carpenter. On hearing reports of his wife's infidelity, the carpenter thus debated within himself :

'What shall I do now? Shall I try and find out if these reports are true? It will take much of my time, and cause me a good deal of humiliation if I proceed to make enquiries concerning

the matter. And what shall it profit me if eventually I find out that my wife is unfaithful? Wise men have said that nothing is gained by searching for the source of a river, the origin of the family of a hero or sage, or by testing the fidelity of a wayward woman. A woman is born good or bad, and nothing can make the wicked virtuous. Fire may, perhaps, turn cold to the touch, and moonbeams warm, but a wayward wench can never turn chaste.... But it is good that I find out the truth about the reports of my wife's infidelity, if only to know where

exactly I stand. Rumour is a strange thing, but at times it has proved greater than the Vedas and the Sastras as a guide to truth.'

The carpenter now worked out an ingenious plan to test his wife's loyalty. He told his wife that he had been asked to work on a building in a far town, on very high wages, and had accepted the offer. And he asked his wife to get all the necessary things ready for his journey as early as possible, so that he could start on the next day. He also warned his wife that there were many wicked men in the town, and she should always be on her guard in his absence, as evil men pounce upon a young, defenceless woman as tigers on their prey.



The carpenter's wife, on hearing this, made a show of sorrow and protested her loyalty and constancy, but agreed that it was right that he should go on his new assignment, as that would ensure them a decent income from which they could lay by something for a rainy day.

Accordingly, early next morning, the carpenter took leave of his wife, and went on his faked assignment.

As soon as the carpenter had gone, his wife dressed herself in superlative finery and went to the rich merchant Devadatta who had many a time feasted his eyes on her beauty, but was unable to get access to her because of the presence of the carpenter. Devadatta was delighted to see the gaily dressed young woman, and enquired of her the object of her unexpected but welcome visit.

'The fool of my husband,' said the frivolous woman laughing, 'is gone on a long journey and will not be back for months. Many times have I seen you admiring my beauty, with desire in your eyes; and my heart has been pierced by the arrows of Kama. Tonight, I am sure, we shall have the great opportunity both of us have been waiting for. So pray come to my house as the night advances and the streets get clear of people.' The delighted merchant agreed to visit her that very night.

Truly has it been said that an adulterous woman rejoices during dark nights when the roads are clear, and on rainy days when her husband is away and her paramour, in.

The carpenter passed the day on the outskirts of the city; he ate the meal he was carrying, rested in the

shade of a tree, and at dusk started on his way back home. Under cover of darkness he managed to gain his house without being seen by any one he knew, and as his wife was preparing supper for her paramour in the kitchen, he quietly crept into his bedroom and hid himself under the cot.

After preparing the meal, the carpenter's wife took a bath, made the bed for her paramour and herself to sleep on, and waited for Devadatta.

Presently appeared the merchant. They had a quick supper. As the woman was washing the plates after the meal, Devadatta came to the bedroom and sat on the cot under which the carpenter was hiding. On this, the indignant carpenter said to himself: 'What shall I do now? Get out from under the bed and kill the wicked adulterer? Or shall I wait till my unfaithful wife comes, and then kill them both?'

Thinking deeply over the question, the carpenter, in the end, decided to wait and kill the two together as that, he concluded, would be meting out just punishment to two sinners at the same time.

As he emphasized this grim determination with appropriate gestures, he moved his right hand, and at that moment his wife came and sat on the cot near the merchant and her dangling leg happened to touch the hand of the carpenter. The truth now flashed in the mind of the quick-witted woman. 'This man under the bed,' she concluded with the unerring intuition common to her sex, 'could be none other than my suspicious husband. And if I don't act with speed, all will be lost, may be, life itself.'

Devadatta, who was eagerly waiting for her arrival, passed his hands round the woman's waist, when she said to him coldly: 'You must know, merchant Devadatta, that I am a chaste woman, ever devoted to the service and welfare of my beloved husband.'

This protestation of loyalty intrigued both the carpenter under the bed and the merchant over it!

'What is the meaning of all this?' asked Devadatta; 'you came to me this morning and invited me to your house for my company, and now you behave as if you were Sati, the goddess of virtue, herself!'

'It is, alas, all true,' said the woman with a long-drawn sigh; 'but listen to me, and I shall explain to you what made me do so mad a thing.'

And she started her tale. The carpenter was, in fact, more attentive than the merchant when the woman narrated the following story: 'It is my habit, good man, to go to the temple of Kali often and worship the goddess. This morning, after the departure of my husband, I went to the temple and, grieved at separation from him, prayed hard and long for the early and safe return of my husband. And a strange thing happened! For, in answer to my prayer, the good goddess appeared to me in visible form and said with a sorrowful face: "Daughter, your devotion to your husband pleaseth me; but he is destined to die soon and leave you a widow." These words of the goddess struck me like lightning, like poisoned arrows on a sore, and I implored her, holding her feet, to save my husband from death. The goddess, in response to my persistent prayer, said graciously: "Daughter, there is

only one way by which you can save the life of your husband, but I am afraid the remedy is worse than the malady; but if you can do it, your husband will live a hundred years." I told the goddess that I would do anything to save my husband, even if it were to cost my life. On this the great goddess, from whom nothing is hidden, said to me: "It will not cost you your life but the most treasured possession of a Pativrata.* For evil can only be overcome by evil: this is the law of Nature. So you must, without delay, invite to your house a stranger and lie with him." Thus caught between the devil

and the deep, I decided to sacrifice my virtue for once, and secure the longevity of my dear husband.... It is thus that I came to your house this morning and invited you to my bed.... Now pray, finish your business quick and depart; for if you tarry long I might change my mind, as thoughts of disloyalty to my husband oppress me.'

On hearing this wonderful story, the carpenter was amazed at the fidelity of his wife and was struck with remorse for having suspected her. And he allowed the business of love to proceed unhindered over his head!

After Devadatta had taken his pleasure with the woman, the latter

* Chaste woman



got up, and with folded hands, implored him: 'Saviour of my husband's life, I make obeisance to you. Now forget all that has happened, and kindly depart. I can now only wish for my husband's speedy return. And till he comes, I will don white clothes, sleep on coarse floor, live like a nun, on frugal fare, and spend my days and nights in prayers.' And sorrowing for her absent husband, she shed tears profusely; for women, as is well-known, can produce tears at will!

The carpenter could not bear all this any longer. He emerged from underneath the bed, embraced his wife and cried in self-plty: 'O you, goddess of

purity, I am unworthy of you! Swayed by malicious gossip, I suspected you, my dear wife, pure as gold, lustrous as diamond, and virtuous as Sita! I am, alas, the vilest of Brahma's creatures, and for my sin there is no pardon! O, incarnation of virtue, forgive this wretch.' And he fell at his wife's feet.

The carpenter was with difficulty raised to his feet by his wife. Then turning to Devadatta, he said: 'Noble sir, by lying with my wife tonight, you have saved my life, and I adore you!' And then holding the two by the shoulder, the carpenter started dancing in wild joy.

10

THE CLEVER MATRON YASODEVI

From Suka Saptati or 'Seventy Tales of an Enchanted Parrot,' a work of unknown authorship ascribed to the 11th century. The seventy tales were told by an enchanted parrot, a celestial condemned to bird-life by a curse, that came into the possession of a gentleman named Madana. By narrating these tales the good bird kept its mistress, the young wife of Madana, in the path of virtue when she thought of straying... Prabhavati, according to the story, was young and vivacious but not particularly wicked. On her husband going to a distant city where he had business, she did not know how to spend her evening and her evil attendants, not very loyal to Madana, advised her to go out and pick up some handsome young man and spend the night with him. The young lady thought this a good idea, and as the sun went down, dressed herself gaily, and came out of her house. On this, the parrot, living confined in a cage on the portico, warned its mistress that it was improper for a married lady of her position and breeding to go out at night alone when her husband was away. The angered lady, determined to punish the officious bird, asked her attendants to wring its neck. The bird, now pretending fright, told Prabhavati that she might go on her nocturnal adventure if she were, by any chance, as clever as such-and-such a woman, who, the bird said, was reputed for her high intelligence and adroitness. Prabhavati was very interested in this wonderful lady, and asked the parrot to tell all about her. The parrot now started narrating the story of the lady and Prabhavati was all attention; by the time the bird had finished the tale, the young night had grown old, and Prabhavati abandoned her adventure for that night. This was repeated sixty-nine nights; on the seventieth, Prabhavati's husband returned and the parrot told Madana the last tale and, now released from the curse, ascended to its celestial abode.

WHEN the sun had gone down and darkness began to envelop the earth, Prabhavati put on her finest clothes,

adorned herself with the best of her ornaments and emerged from her room into the porch, determined to

seek a handsome lover to spend the night with, when the wise parrot, turning its head to one side and looking obliquely at her, said to Prabhavati: 'You may go out tonight if you are, by any chance, as clever as Yasodevi, in gaining your ends.'

'And who, pray, is Yasodevi, of whom you seem to entertain a very high opinion?' asked Prabhavati.

'I suppose you want to hear the story of Yasodevi before my neck is wrung,' said the parrot.

'I don't know,' replied Prabhavati; 'perhaps, after hearing the story of Yasodevi, I may change my mind and

spare you. Anyway, you are well advised to tell me the story as otherwise I shall certainly have your neck wrung.'

The parrot now decided to tell the story and this is the tale it told of the clever Yasodevi.

In a country called Nandana, there lived a king of the same name and he had a son named Rajasekhara. Rajasekhara's wife, Sasiprabha, was a beautiful lady, in the full bloom of youth and vigour, and the mere sight of her broke the heart of many and many a young man.

Of Sasiprabha's admirers, none was so stricken by the wounds caused by the relentless Kama* as Dhanasena, a young merchant prince of Nandana. Pining for Sasiprabha, the young man would neither eat nor drink; his affairs fell into neglect, and nothing could make him take an interest in his business or his health.

Yasodevi, Dhanasena's mother, not knowing what had gone wrong with her only son, wished to know of him the cause of his sorrow, and why he was so cheerless, depressed and forlorn. The young merchant was at first loath to confide to his mother his guilty passion for the wife of the prince, but pressed by his mother, Dhanasena at last confessed his love for Sasiprabha. 'O Mother!' he cried piteously, 'I cannot live without the beautiful Sasiprabha. She has conquered my body, mind and soul, and I am her abject slave! I know my passion is sinful and it can never be satisfied. So all that I can do is to waste away like a brook the springs of which have dried, burn away like a lamp that has consumed all oil!



* The Indian Cupid, the god of love.

Pray, mother, prepare a pyre for my funeral.'

On hearing this, Yasodevi was greatly distressed. She loved her son more than she loved herself. It was clear to her that his hopeless love for Sasiprabha would eventually kill him, while to get the princess for his pleasure would not only be sinful but extremely difficult, if not actually impossible.

In this predicament, Yasodevi thought hard over the problem and decided that she should save the life of her son at any cost, even if the good Sasiprabha had to be seduced. 'For it is sanctioned by the law of distress,' said Yasodevi to herself, 'that when love has so stricken a man as to demerit or kill him, he may, without incurring sin, have relations even with another man's wife in order to save himself.' So calling him aside she comforted her ailing son and assured him that she would bring Sasiprabha to him.

Yasodevi now fasted for a few days, donned the white clothes of a woman in mourning and, in order to gain the end she had in view, managed to get from the street, a sore-ridden, miserable bitch. Leading the bitch by a leash, Yasodevi went to Sasiprabha.

Seeing the matron Yasodevi, reputed the richest lady in the city, coming to her in obvious mourning, leading a dirty bitch, Sasiprabha was much intrigued. She asked her what it all meant, especially her mourning as she was not aware of any one having died in Yasodevi's house. 'And why, my dear lady, have you brought this skinny, miserable creature here?' asked Sasiprabha.

'Noble princess,' replied Yasodevi, shedding false tears, 'you do not seem to know who this wretched creature is. When you will have grown as old as myself, you will probably know more about your past life. . . . When I saw this poor animal coming crawling to me in the street, wagging its hairless tail, my mind's eye opened to my previous birth, and recognition struck me like lightning. This poor bitch, Sasiprabha, is our sister!'

'What?' asked Sasiprabha, and she gaped.

'Listen, Sasiprabha,' said Yasodevi with emotion, 'this bitch, you and I were uterine sisters in our past life. But, alas, while both of us were reborn in human state, this dear sister of ours has been condemned to canine existence for her sins.' And Yasodevi, unable to proceed further, wept!

'And what was the sin of this, our poor sister?' asked Sasiprabha, now herself moved to tears.

'Her major sin,' explained Yasodevi, 'was what the dull would call virtue. The prime virtue in every being, as you know, is *ahimsa* or non-injury to others. All the three of us were the daughters of a merchant, beautiful and accomplished alike; while you and I considered *ahimsa* the greatest sin, our sister, from a mistaken notion of virtue, caused much sorrow to many men.'

'How?' asked Sasiprabha, greatly interested.

'It is like this,' said Yasodevi; 'you and I were generous, and rarely caused sorrow to our admirers. We gave freely. And what greater gift can a beautiful woman bestow on a man than her own self? Myself, instructed in

secret lore by a seer, never withheld my favours from any one who asked for it, and as a result, in this life, am blessed with a knowledge of the past; you were not so liberal as myself but still gave yourself to those who ardently desired you; so though you are not gifted with the knowledge of past and future events, you are born in a noble family and married to a prince. But this poor sister of ours, imagining herself virtuous, caused heartache, misery and even death to many admirers by her obstinate denial of herself, and as a punishment is condemned to be re-born as a bitch.' And the compassionate Yasodevi looked at the wretched bitch and wept!

Sasiprabha shuddered. She had in fact been living a devoted life and though many lovers on several occasions, before and after her marriage, had cast eyes on her and had even made direct approaches for her favours, she had persistently rejected all advances from all quarters; considering the anguish she had thus caused to so many men by her refusal, Sasiprabha dreaded to think of the punishment reserved for her in the next birth.

'I am lost,' she cried in despair, and in extreme distress told Yasodevi how in her confusion of virtue with vice, she had been causing pain, sorrow, heartache and even dementia to men. She now repented, she told Yasodevi, and would like to make amends for her many sins.

'Well,' said Yasodevi, 'I do not think it is too late for you to leave your evil ways and take to the righteous life. For this you must first take your husband into your confidence; for the love

he bears you, he will, I am sure, when apprised of the facts, let you consort with strangers. Further, I shall willingly do what I can to help you. If you so desire, you may come to my house for a few days' stay, as the entry and exit of strangers to and from the palace will be observed by many, will give rise to scandals and derange our plans. . . . Further, there is greater merit in giving without asking. In fact, men who seek your favours are not so worthy as those who do not ask for them. You know, my young son, Dhanasena, is shy and reserved, has never courted a woman, and I think, in the secrecy of my house you can practise the royal virtue of generosity without raising scandals.'

Sasiprabha was greatly relieved by this proffered service of Yasodevi,



thanked her profusely for her concern for her, and easily enough obtained her husband's permission to visit Yasodevi and stay in her house as a guest.

'So, if you are as clever as Yasodevi,' said the parrot, 'you may certainly go

out tonight; otherwise, go to your bedroom and sleep alone in comfort.'

By now the night had advanced far, and it was too late for Prabhavati to go out, and hence she went to her bedroom and slept alone that night.

II

THE CURSE OF HUSBANDS

From Somadeva's Katha Sarit Sagara or 'Ocean of Story.' Somadeva lived in the eleventh century of the Christian era, and is said to have written these stories for the entertainment of queen Suryavati of Kashmir. The queen's life was marked by several turns of fortune; Kashmir was, at the time, torn by strife and civil wars, and Suryavati was in sore need of the solace afforded by these tales. Thus the sufferings caused by the political revolutions in Kashmir inspired Katha Sarit Sagara as the plague in Florence did Boccaccio's Decameron. Katha Sarit Sagara is, in fact, a selection of tales from an earlier work known as Brihad Katha, 'World Story' or 'Great Story,' by an author named Gunadhya. From the nature of the tales and the manner of narrating them, it would appear that the author of the Arabian Nights owed much to the Brihad Katha. This book is now lost, but references to it appear in many medieval works; it was said to contain 100,000 distichs whereas Katha Sarit Sagara has but 22,000. Even in this condensed form, the book is one of the most voluminous in Sanskrit literature. Katha Sarit Sagara has been translated into English by C. H. Tawney and published in ten volumes for private circulation.

ON the heights of Sumeru,* there stood a city called Virapura and there reigned Samara, a king of the Vidyadharas.† He had a daughter named Anangaprabha. The princess was

* A mythical mountain, at times identified with the Himalaya.

† Vidyadharas are mentioned in Indian scriptures as semi-mythical beings inhabiting the celestial hills of the north: rangers of woodlands, they are, like the Gandharvas and Apsaras of easy morals. In all probability they were powerful non-Aryan peoples, at first hostile to the invading Aryans but later admitted into the Indo-Aryan fold.

surpassingly lovely; and many renowned princes from distant lands came to woo her; but she considered herself so far above them that she disdainfully rejected all her suitors. The king too tried to arrange several matches for her, but Anangaprabha was so puffed up with pride that she turned down every proposal he brought. Samara now looked high and low for a suitable son-in-law who would capture the heart of his daughter, and at last found one

in prince Madanaprabha. The young man was handsome, brave and of noble bearing; descended from a royal line of Vidyadharas, he practised all the virtues proper to his lineage and station, and had great learning besides. But when Madanaprabha came to woo Anangaprabha, the haughty princess rejected him too. This infuriated king Samara; he flew into a fit of rage and cursed his daughter thus:

'Since you have spurned the accomplished prince Madanaprabha, you are only fit to be the wife of mere mortals. So you shall have an ugly mortal for your husband, and shall be subject to many other men besides.'

Queen Anangavati, mother of Anangaprabha, who heard her husband's words, was greatly distressed, and implored the king to take pity on his daughter and cancel the curse. The king too, when his anger had subsided, repented of his rash curse; but the curse of puissant beings could never go in vain, and he had no power of cancelling it. So, after due reflection, Samara declared: 'My curse cannot be cancelled. The sun that sets shall rise again, the tree that dies might sprout again, but words once uttered, cannot be recalled or cancelled. But Anangaprabha, my daughter, will regain her Vidyadhara state when she marries Madanaprabha who is destined to be reborn as a king in the world of mortals.'

Soon Samara's curse began to work, and Anangaprabha, who had all along looked down upon men, started yearning for a husband. And not long after, there came to the court of Samara an ugly Brahmin, Jivadatta by name, profi-

cient in the black arts and possessing a magic sword that could kill any one in battle. He asked Samara for his daughter's hand; as a refusal could only lead to the destruction of the Vidyadharas by the invincible sword of the Brahmin, the king acceded to the Brahmin's request; besides, Anangaprabha had come to such a desperate strait for a husband that she was prepared to marry the first man she met. So the princess who had spurned the handsome celestial Madanaprabha, married in the end an ugly mortal who practised the black arts.

The couple lived for some time among the Vidyadharas in Virapura when the Brahmin wished to descend to the land of mortals. Anangaprabha was willing to accompany him, and the two, by the Brahmin's magic, descended on a wooded hill devoid of habitation. The scenery from the hillside was wonderful. Trees were in bloom, singing birds and humming bees filled the air with resonant music; streams gurgled past the sloping hillside; and water-birds swam gaily in the forest pools filled with lotuses and lilies; a cool breeze was blowing, and Jivadatta, enchanted by the beauty and charm of the hill, wished to take rest in a quiet spot for some time. As he laid himself to rest, he asked Anangaprabha to sit beside him and sing in her sweetest voice; and lulled by the music and the cooling zephyr, the Brahmin fell asleep.

As destiny would have it, king Harihara, of the city of Harihara, was at that time hunting game in that forest; hearing melodious strains in that uninhabited woodland, he became

curious to know who was singing so sweetly, apparently without an audience. Following the trail of the voice, Harihara found Anangaprabha, lovely as a fay, singing the sweetest song he had ever heard, and the scarecrow Jivadatta sleeping beside her. First the king felt revolted at the incompatibility of the couple and then he pitied the young lady so ill-matched; pity turned into love, and love into infatuation. The lady's blushing cheeks and restless eyes betrayed her own passion for him, and the king, an expert in reading women's minds, knew that she had fallen in love with him. 'Who

are you, young lady, and how are you stranded in this uninhabited region with this man,' he asked her, pointing contemptuously to Jivadatta.

'From your bearing and speech, I know you are a king,' said Anangaprabha, 'and this man, whose mind is uglier than his body, obtained by the practice of the black arts, a magic sword which is invincible in battle; you see the weapon lying near him. By the power of that detestable weapon, he came to my father, who is a king, and demanded me for his bride. My father, fearing the destruction of his kingdom, gave me in marriage to this



scoundrel, much against his will and mine. After marriage, the evil man has brought me away to this wild place.... O king, you are the protector of the distressed! Pray, take me away from this place before this horrid man wakes up!

A second invitation was not necessary, and the king led Anangaprabha away, taking with him the magic sword of the ugly Brahmin.

When he woke up from his sleep, Jivadatta found neither his wife nor the magic sword, and like a bird bereft of wings, began to wail. But wailing did not help, and he started looking for his wife. Jivadatta wandered for many days in the forest, and eventually came to a village. He had been practically starving all these days, and so went to the first house he saw to ask for a meal. As soon as the lady of the house, Priyadatta, saw Jivadatta, she called out to her servant: 'Here comes the Brahmin Jivadatta who has not eaten cooked food for thirteen days; go and prepare a feast for him immediately.'

When Jivadatta heard this, he was amazed; for he was a stranger in that part of the world and did not know any one there; so he asked the housewife how she came to know his name and that he was starving for thirteen days.

'Good Brahmin Jivadatta,' said Priyadatta; 'by the power of my Pativrittyam or devotion to my husband, the greatest virtue in a woman, I have gained omniscience, and know all past, present and future events.'

By now the husband of the lady also came to the house, and both together entertained Jivadatta with all the

hospitality due to an honoured guest.

After Jivadatta had feasted himself, he asked Priyadatta if she could tell him by her omniscience where his wife was and how he could obtain her. 'Anangaprabha is in the harem of Harihara,' she replied; 'and at this moment she is enjoying herself with the king. Harihara is a powerful king and there is absolutely no chance of your getting her back, especially as you are now without your magic sword. Besides, you deserve desertion by your wife as punishment for your sins; for you have forsaken the study of the Vedas, proper to your caste and station in life, and taken to the practice of the black arts in order to gain selfish ends. You must now realise that the pleasures of the world are transitory and good Brahmins ought to strive only after things eternal.'

On hearing this, abandoning all thoughts of regaining Anangaprabha, Jivadatta left for the forests of the Himalayas for doing penance for his sins in order to obtain release from rebirth in this transitory world of vain women and wicked men.

Now, as king Harihara lived happily with his new acquisition to his harem, there came to his palace from the Middle Country, a famous teacher of dancing, one Labdavara by name. As Anangaprabha was fond of dancing, the king thought she would be glad to learn the Middle Country style, and appointed him dancing master to the queen. After teaching Anangaprabha many new steps of the Middle Country school of dancing, one day Labdavara initiated her into a very strange posture which she immensely liked. And in order to indulge in the Middle Coun-

try style with greater comfort and intimacy, the two, the dancing master and his royal disciple, fled at night from Harihara to a distant country.

King Harihara was much grieved by this ungrateful action of Anangaprabha and consulted his chief minister as to what could be done to reclaim the queen and punish Labdavara. The wise counsellor thus advised his king: 'A fickle woman, Your Majesty, is like the passing glow of sunset, transitory, evanescent, impermanent. A king has greater things to live for than worrying about a faithless woman who came like the west wind and went like the east wind. You know that she deserted her husband and came with you; then what wonder that she has now left you and eloped with a dancer? Women, it is said by sages of old, are taken by actors, dancers, musicians, bards and liars. So, pray, forget that base and wayward wench and take your pleasure with the hundreds of beautiful faithful ladies you have in your harem.'

Harihara, on reflection, considered this a sensible course to follow and he drowned his misery in the pleasures of the harem.

In the meantime, Labdavara and Anangaprabha, fleeing as fast and as far as they could, reached the city of Yogapuri. Here, with the money they had brought from Harihara's palace, they bought a mansion and lived in grand style. Labdavara was fond of wine and dice, and he fell into the company of a gambler named Sudarsana, who became a constant visitor to his household and taught the game of dice to Labdavara and Anangaprabha. Before long, Sudarsana stripped Labdavara of all his wealth, drove

him out of his house and lived with Anangaprabha who had by now taken a liking for him. The forlorn Labdavara, reduced to penury and want, renounced the world, donned the saffron robes of the wandering pilgrim and, with a broken heart between his ribs and a crooked staff in his hand, proceeded to the holy Ganges to wash away his sins and meditate on the mutability of life.

As Sudarsana was living merrily with Anangaprabha, one night thieves broke into the house and robbed him of all his wealth. In the morning the gambler and Anangaprabha went to Hiranyagupta, the rich usurer of the city, to borrow some money. Seeing the gambler with a charming companion, Hiranyagupta asked them to lunch; Sudarsana curtly declined the offer and said with a frown that he had come for a loan and not for a lunch; Anangaprabha, however, happened to be hungry, and accepted the invitation. So Hiranyagupta took her to the inner apartments of his house for lunch and placed a stool on the outer verandah for Sudarsana to sit and wait. Hiranyagupta and Anangaprabha ate a sumptuous lunch, drank delicious wines, and went to sleep. Sudarsana, waiting long for the return of Anangaprabha, at last lost patience and asked for his wife, when the servants told him that she had finished her lunch and gone home long ago, and he had possibly dozed on the stool and missed her. The incredulous Sudarsana protested that he was wide awake all along, and started making a din when Hiranyagupta asked his servants to throw him out into the street, which was promptly done.

The gambler could do nothing. There was no use his going to law, as every one in the city knew that Anangaprabha was not his wife. All that Sudarsana could do, under the circumstances, was to give up the transient pleasures of the world and do penance for his evil deeds. So he went to the wild regions of Bhadrinath to contemplate the Infinite in solitude, and ultimately attain spiritual excellence.

Hiranyagupta and Anangaprabha became inseparable, and when the former went on a trading venture to Suvarnabhumi, on the other side of the Eastern Sea, he took his mistress with him. They embarked at the port of Sagarapura, but when the vessel in which they were voyaging was in mid-ocean, a storm broke out and the ship was wrecked. Hiranyagupta was miraculously saved and picked up by a passing boat; he wept over the loss of Anangaprabha, but there was no point in grieving over the inevitable and so he went back to his own city of Yogapuri and lived there as before.

Anangaprabha did not die in the shipwreck, as her destiny had not yet been fulfilled. There was on board the ship, a good sailor called Sagaravira, a fisherman by caste, who had already taken a fancy for the vivacious lady bound for Suvarnabhumi; as the ship sank, he managed to get two floating planks, tie them together and help Anangaprabha on to the raft; he then rowed the raft towards Sagarapura and eventually reached the harbour in safety.

Anangaprabha was, at first, loath to associate herself with the low-born fisherman, but life, as is well-known, is dearer than caste, and as Sagaravira had saved her life, he was to her as

good as Brahma the creator; so she married him and lived with him in the fisherman's village on the outskirts of Sagarapura.

One day, however, a handsome young Kshatriya youth passed that way; Anangaprabha was getting tired of being a fishwife, and falling for the looks of the dashing youth, accosted him and addressed him in terms of love. The young Kshatriya, struck by the beauty and boldness of the woman, took her with him. 'She is, no doubt, low-born,' thought the Kshatriya youth, 'but law-givers have said that a good looking woman is acceptable from any caste. It is on account of this that king Shantanu of the illustrious lunar line married the fishwoman Satyavati.' Thus setting at rest the qualms of his conscience, the Kshatriya youth took Anangaprabha away. His name was Vijayavarman.

On Sagaravira coming to know of the flight of his wife with Vijayavarman, he was grievously hurt. 'I saved the unfaithful woman from the clutches of the roaring main, and have done everything in my power to please her,' he wailed, 'and see what she has done! She has gone with a stranger from nowhere who has done nothing for her, and has plunged me into eternal despair.' But he could do nothing but weep; for he was a poor fisherman and the despoiler of his wife was a wealthy Kshatriya of noble birth; so he had no chance against the ravisher either in law or in society. Hence pining for his beloved, Sagaravira left his trade and his village, went on a pilgrimage to the holy city of Benaras and started practising piety in order to be reborn in a better caste after death.

As Anangaprabha was living comfortably with Vijayavarman, one day the royal procession passed by her house. The king of the place, Sagaravarman, was riding on the leading elephant and at the sight of the handsome young king, unknown emotions surged up in the breast of Anangaprabha. In order to obtain a closer view of the king, she climbed onto the balcony of her house, and as the state elephant came near, shouted, in spite of all her efforts to restrain herself, to the mahout: 'Pray, give me a ride on your elephant with the king!'

At this strange request of the woman, the mahout looked at the king. Sagaravarman now saw Anangaprabha,

and he felt an intense desire for her company, a passion he had never felt before in his life for a woman. He immediately asked her to join him, and the king rode off with Anangaprabha.

On seeing this, Vijayavarman, who loved Anangaprabha more than his life, rushed out sword in hand and attacked the royal elephant. He was immediately cut down by the king's bodyguard, and his brave soul went to the blessed regions reserved for heroic Kshatriyas killed in action.

Anangaprabha now lived happily with Sagaravarman for many years, for he was none other than the Vidyadhara prince Madanaprabha, reborn to wed Anangaprabha and release her from her father's curse.



12

THE OLD BRAHMIN AND HIS YOUNG WIFE

From the Jataka Tales. The Jataka Tales form part of the Tipitaka, Buddhist Canon, compiled in Pali in the third century before Christ. These are the oldest collection of Indian tales, and were the main inspiration for the Panchatantra. The Jataka Tales are about five hundred and fifty in number and each tale is supposed to be connected with a previous birth of the Buddha and revealed for the benefit of mankind. As a matter of fact, they are selections from folk tales and stories current at the time, given a moral tone, and the best character in each story is identified with the Bodhisattva or Buddha-to-be as the Buddha was known in his previous births.

LONG long ago, when Janaka was king of Benaras, there was in this city a poor Brahmin who lived on the alms given by the pious. He was in the habit of laying aside a portion of what he received and had, by the time he was old, a thousand pieces of silver as his savings. He now wished to go on a pilgrimage to holy places and so entrusting his money to another Brahmin, a friend of his, for safe custody he departed on his pilgrimage.

The Brahmin who received the money for safe keeping thought that he could make a good profit by investing it in some trading venture; so he set up a business in the city with the entrusted money, and as often happens with

people who do business with other people's money, lost everything. As a result, when the pilgrim returned he was unable to pay back the money, and offered to the pilgrim in lieu his young daughter in marriage. The old man was delighted with the offer and married the girl.

The Brahmin lived with his bride in a village near the city of Benaras. But because of his old age, the man was no match for his young and lively wife and hence she developed an interest in a handsome young Brahmin youth who lived near by, and started an illicit affair with him. The young man became a regular visitor to the household when the old Brahmin went out on his



begging rounds, and the woman loved his company and encouraged his visits. For as wise men have said of yore, the ocean can never be satiated with rivers, a fool with sins, a babbler with loose talk, a learned man with the scriptures, fire with fuel, and a woman with men.

The young woman and her paramour became, in course of time, inseparable and found the presence of the old Brahmin in his own house a nuisance, and decided to send him away to a far country and have the house to themselves.

So one day the young woman told her husband: 'My noble husband, I am quite tired of working in the house day

and night. Pray get me a slave girl who will help me in the kitchen.'

'But my dear girl,' replied the old Brahmin, 'you know well enough that I am poor and what I get is but just enough to keep us alive; then how can I have money to buy a slave girl, and feed her into the bargain?'

'In that case,' suggested the woman, 'the best thing you can do is to go to some far off country of generous citizens and beg for alms; after collecting enough to buy a slave girl, you can come back, and we will live together happily for the rest of our lives.'

The old simpleton agreed that this was the best thing he could do for raising funds with which to buy a slave



girl; so the very next day he left his house and went to a distant country, where people were reputed to be liberal to Brahmins.

The poor Brahmin went begging from city to city, from town to town, and from village to village, and after several months managed to collect seven hundred silver pieces which, he thought, would be enough to buy a slave girl for his wife. So with this amount he started on his way back home.

Travelling day and night he reached the outskirts of the city of Benaras one day by noon. As he felt hungry, he sat down under a tree that stood by the river, and ate his meal from the bag he was carrying. After the meal, forgetting to close the mouth of the bag, he went down to the river to wash his hands and rinse his mouth, and a black cobra that was watching him from a hollow in the tree, crept into the bag and settled on the remaining food in the bag. On coming back from the river, the Brahmin noticed that the mouth of the bag was open and so closed and tied it with a cord, not caring to look as to what was inside.

The Brahmin took the bag and flung it on his back to start his journey, when he heard a voice from a tree. It was the tree sprite uttering a warning: 'If you rest on the wayside for the night, you will die; if you reach home tonight, your wife will die.'

The Brahmin was alarmed by the warning and did not know what to do as, according to the voice, he was to die if he rested on the wayside for the night and his wife would die if he reached home that night. However, he

started for the city, but on reaching it, did not go straight home because of the warning of the tree sprite. While wandering in the streets of Benaras, undecided about his next move, he heard that Senaka, the wise minister of the king, was giving a sermon in the public park. The Brahmin thought that Senaka would be able to tell him the meaning of the warning of the tree sprite, and so he proceeded to the park where Senaka was speaking. The Brahmin could not concentrate on Senaka's sermon as he was worrying about the warning voice he had heard, and so he stood away from the crowd, sad and sullen. Seeing the gloomy Brahmin, Senaka sent for him and asked him for the cause of his sorrow. On this the Brahmin told the minister all that had happened and of the warning of the tree sprite.

Senaka pondered over the whole thing, and in his supreme wisdom knew the meaning of the words of the tree sprite. He asked the Brahmin to produce his bag, and when this was placed before him he took a stick and beat it. The snake started wriggling in the bag and was eventually killed, when Senaka opened the bag and showed it to all present. 'What the good tree sprite had said,' remarked Senaka, pointing to the reptile, 'was perfectly true. If the Brahmin had rested on the wayside, he would have started to take his evening meal out of the bag, and the snake would have stung him; on the other hand, if he had reached home, he would have given the bag to his wife, and on her opening it, the snake would have killed her.'

Upon this, all the men praised the great wisdom of Senaka. The minister,

out of pity for the poor Brahmin, gave him three hundred pieces of silver, so that with the one thousand he now had, he could easily buy a slave girl and have, in addition, something to lay by for a rainy day.

With the thousand coins, the Brahmin proceeded merrily to his house. But he thought it would be unsafe to keep all that money in his house, which was no better than a hut, especially as all the people in the park had come to know that he had a good deal of money with him; so, at night-fall he went to a deserted place, buried the money under a tree and then went home.

On reaching his house, his young

wife received the old Brahmin with apparent joy. She asked him how much he had collected for the purchase of the slave girl and he told her that he had collected a thousand pieces, and had buried it safely under a tree. She now enquired of him the exact location of the tree, and he gave her all the details. That night, when the Brahmin was asleep, the paramour of the woman visited her. As the two talked, she confided to him all that her husband had told her, including the location of the tree under which the money was buried. The paramour forthwith proceeded to the tree, dug out the money and took it away to his house.

When next morning the old Brahmin went to the tree to dig out his treasure, he found that the place had already been dug up and the money stolen. Not knowing what else to do, he once again went to Senaka, the wise minister, and told him of the loss of his wealth. Senaka, after patiently listening to all that he said, asked : 'Did you tell your wife where exactly you had buried the treasure?'

'Yes, I did,' replied the Brahmin.

'Did any one visit your house last night?' asked Senaka.

'None, as far as I know,' answered the Brahmin.

Senaka thought for a while, and then asked again : 'Do you or your wife have many friends?'

'Yes,' replied the Brahmin, 'both my wife and myself have many friends.'

'In that case,' suggested Senaka, 'prepare a feast tomorrow and invite to your house fourteen male friends, seven to be chosen by your wife and seven by yourself. Continue to give the feast daily but reduce the guests



by two every day, one from yours and the other from your wife's lists, so that on the seventh day you will have but two guests, one invited by you and the other by your wife. After thus feasting the guests for seven days, see me again and I will tell you what to do next.'

Senaka gave the Brahmin enough money for the feasts and sent him away.

The old Brahmin did as he was told. After seven days he went to Senaka and reported that he had carefully carried out all his instructions, when Senaka asked him : 'Do you know the name and address of the man who came to your house all the seven days as your wife's guest?' The Brahmin replied that he knew, and gave Senaka detailed information about the guest.

Senaka now sent for the man. He was none other than the young paramour of the old Brahmin's wife. Senaka started questioning him about the

money. At first he pretended that he knew nothing about it, but soon he discovered that Senaka was too sharp for him, and under relentless cross-questioning, he contradicted himself and collapsed. Senaka pursued his advantage with vigour, and eventually the man made a clean breast of the whole affair. On this Senaka sent him, under guard, to his house, recovered the money he had dug up from under the tree, and gave it to the old Brahmin. As a punishment for his double crime of adultery and theft, the young Brahmin was banished from the city by Senaka.

Senaka now sent for the young wife of the old Brahmin and rebuked her. He knew, however, that rebuke alone would not help a young healthy woman married to an old simpleton, and so he made the Brahmin stay in a house adjoining his residence, and the couple lived happily under Senaka's fostering care.

13

HOW PRINCE APARIJATA WON HIS MANY WIVES

From Trishashtisalapakapurusha or 'The Lives of the Sixty-three Illustrious Ones.' This Jain classic, ascribed to the scholar saint Hemachandra who lived in the twelfth century of the Christian era gives, as the title indicates, the legendary biographies of the sixty-three Great Ones of Jain hagiology, including, like the Jatakas, their previous births. All the Great Ones, in their final births were, in keeping with the ascetic ideals of Jainism, holy men who had taken the vows of celibacy, conquered all desires and passed on to Sidha Sila, the abode of the blessed, no more to be reborn. But in their former births they were lesser men who were not averse to the pleasures of the world; most of them were, in fact, princes fond of adventure, romance and the company of fair women. The original work was possibly unromantic, and versions are extant which give but arid details of the pious activities of the Great Ones. But later writers added considerably to the original by borrowing freely from the tales current at the time and from the Hindu and Buddhist scriptures. The story here given pertains to the fifth incarnation of the Great One Arishtanemi.

IN OLDEN DAYS there was a king named Harinandin who ruled the city of Simhapuri in Videha. His queen was Priyadarsana. By the merit they had accumulated in many previous births, Arishtanemi was born as a son to them, and they named him Aparijata. The child grew in beauty and strength like the waxing moon, and from his boyhood was trained in the manly sports dear to his caste, and there was none to equal

him in fencing, riding and wrestling. He had for his playmate and companion Vimalabodha, the minister's son.

One day, while the two young men were out riding, the horses ran wild and strayed into a forest where the riders lost their way. As they were wandering in the trackless forest, they heard the piteful yell of a man who was walling to be saved. The prince rode to the spot from where the voice came, and found a man fleeing like a hunted

hare. He fell down before the prince and begged to be saved from his pursuers.

'I afford you protection,' said the prince, 'and none will harm you without first killing me.'

'Your Highness,' interrupted the wise Vimalabodha, 'is it right for you to offer protection to a man you do not know? May be he is a criminal trying to escape from the law.'

'Whoever he may be,' replied the prince, 'it is my duty as a Kshatriya to afford protection to one who has begged for it, and I shall abide by my word.'



Scarcely had the prince finished speaking when a party of soldiers came riding hard and demanded the release of the man. They were the soldiers of the king of Kosala, they said, and the man was a criminal whom they wanted to seize. The prince refused to surrender the supplicant, on which the soldiers became violent and tried to take him by force. Aparijata fought and defeated them. On the soldiers reporting the matter to the king of Kosala, he came with an army to fight Aparijata but the prince bravely faced the army and mowed down the soldiers with his sword. When the king of Kosala saw the prince in action, he was so taken up by his skill and valour that he ordered his troops to stop fighting, and made enquiries as to who his opponent was. Vimalabodha, the minister's son, now made known to the king that Aparijata was the son of king Harinandin. On hearing this, the king of Kosala declared that Harinandin was a close friend of his, embraced Aparijata and conducted him to his palace as an honoured guest. The criminal was pardoned by the king at the request of Aparijata.

The king of Kosala had a beautiful daughter called Kanakamala and he had her married to Aparijata, and the wedding was celebrated with great rejoicing in the kingdom.

Aparijata lived with his bride in Kosala for some time when the love of adventure seized him. Promising his wife and father-in-law that he would return shortly to conduct his wife to his own country, he left Kosala with his companion Vimalabodha.

As the prince and Vimalabodha were crossing a forest on the borders of

Kosala, they heard the cry of a woman in distress. 'Is there no brave man left in the world,' wailed the woman, 'to save a poor woman from a fiend!'

The prince rode fast to the spot, and found a young lady struggling in the arms of a fierce looking man who was about to throw her into a fire-pit. He seized the man by the throat and released the lady from his clutches. On this the man drew his sword and fought the prince, who by a powerful blow broke his opponent's sword. Aparijata could have easily killed him, but as it was unchivalrous for an armed man to fight an unarmed foe, he threw away his sword, and the two fought hand to hand. As an accomplished wrestler, Aparijata knocked his opponent down to the ground. On this the man admitted defeat and begged to be spared. The prince spared his life but asked him what made him attempt the destruction of so fair a lady in so cruel a manner.

'Sir,' said the man, 'I do not know who you are but I am sure you are not an ordinary mortal. I recognize you as my superior and have no hesitation whatsoever in confessing to you my crime. I am Surakanta, son of the Vidyadhara* nobleman Srisena and this lady is princess Ratnamala, daughter of our king Amritsena. When the princess was a child, an astrologer had predicted that she would wed prince Aparijata, son of Harinandin, and from then on she has been contemplating marriage with the prince though she has never seen him. Well, I fell madly in love with her, but she spurned my love and declared obstinately that she would rather throw herself into a

burning fire-pit than marry any one but Aparijata. Maddened by her continued rejection of my suit, I abducted her and brought her to this wild place determined to throw her into a fire-pit as she wished if she would not consent to be married to me.... And the rest of the tale you know but too well.'

'And the person who fought you and saved the princess is none other than Aparijata who stands before you,' declared Vimalabodha.

Princess Ratnamala, who had not until now uttered a word but was shivering like a dove in the talons of a hawk, fell at the prince's feet and cried: 'My lord and husband!'

The prince raised her by the hand and embraced her, when Surakanta said: 'No one, I am now convinced, can resist fate. I bless the two of you and thank the gods that I have been spared the sin of killing an innocent girl.'

Now Surakanta was a great wizard and had with him a pearl and a herb; he gave them to Aparijata in token of his esteem, and said: 'If you wash this pearl with water, pour it on the herb and apply the herb to a wound, the wound will immediately heal.' To demonstrate this he asked the prince to test it on his wounds. When the herb was applied to the wounds Surakanta had sustained in his fight with the prince, all his wounds were immediately healed without leaving scars.

And as they stood admiring the efficacy of the pearl and the herb, there came to the very spot king Amritsena and his wife Kirtimati, with the palace guards, in pursuit of the miscreant who had abducted their daughter. On hearing from Vimalabodha all that had happened, the king conducted Aparijata

* For Vidyadharas, see story no. 11.

and his companion to the palace. Surakanta was pardoned at the request of Aparijata, and the marriage of the prince with Ratnamala was celebrated the very next day.

After spending some days with his newly won bride, prince Aparijata and his companion once again started in quest of fresh adventures. While crossing the borders of the Vidyadhara country the young men felt thirsty. The prince rested under a beautiful mango tree in the woodlands while Vimalabodha went in search of water. There was no lake or river near by and as it was summer all the pools were dry; so Vimalabodha had to go far into the interior of the jungle to find water. At last, after many hours of search he found a lake, miles away from the place where the prince was resting; but when he came back with the water the prince was no longer under the mango tree. Vimalabodha called out the name of Aparijata several times and wander-

ed all over the woodlands, lamenting and wailing, but all to no avail. Eventually he saw two men and he enquired of them if they had by any chance seen the prince. The men knew all about Aparijata. The woodlands into which they had strayed, they told Vimalabodha, was a charmed one, the haunt of the Vidyadharas; Kamalini and Kaumudini, the two daughters of the Vidyadhara chief Bhuvanabhanu, happened to come that way when the prince was sleeping under the mango tree; both the girls fell in love with the prince and they had him transported to their palace. The chief wanted to have his daughters married to Aparijata; the prince was willing but would not consent to marriage till his friend Vimalabodha was brought to him, and so Bhuvanabhanu sent messengers all over the woodlands to find the prince's friend; the two men Vimalabodha met were, in fact, the chief's messengers, they told him. The de-



ighted Vimalabodha accompanied the messengers, and soon the separated friends met and shed tears of joy.

Kamalini and Kaumudini were then duly married to prince Aparijata.

After staying with his two wives for some weeks, prince Aparijata with Vimalabodha left the Vidyadhara country in search of further adventures, and reached the city of Srimandira ruled over by king Suprabha. The prince heard that a few days back the king had been attacked by an assassin, and the knife wound in the king's chest was deep and dangerous; the wound started festering and all the physicians in the kingdom could not heal the king. The king's condition worsened and the citizens, both men and women, were wailing for the king when Aparijata reached the city. The prince now declared himself a physician, and with the pearl and the herb he had received from Surakanta healed many people, so that the report spread throughout the city that a wonderful foreign leech had arrived in the place and could heal any wound. The news also reached the palace, and Aparijata was immediately sent for. He cured the king easily enough by the power of the pearl and the herb, and the wound healed without leaving any scar. The king now asked the leech who he was and how he could reward him, and Vimalabodha told him that the leech was prince Aparijata, son of Harinandin, and he was going from country to country in search of adventures. On this Suprabha declared that he was an ally and friend of Harinandin and was delighted to see his son, apart from the gratitude he owed him for curing him of his wound.

Suprabha had a daughter named Rambha, as lovely as the fay of that name, the adornment of Indra's court. The princess was married to Aparijata, and the citizens of Srimandira were transported from the depth of despair to the bliss of heaven.

Leaving his newly won bride, as before, prince Aparijata and Vimalabodha again travelled far and reached the city of Janananda where king Jitasatru ruled. Jitasatru had an only daughter called Pratimati, renowned in the whole kingdom not only for her great beauty but also for her proficiency in logic and polemics. Many princes from distant lands came asking for her hand, but she would not wed any one who could not defeat her in argument. Several accomplished royal suitors, well versed in sacred lore, tried to defeat her in argument, but none succeeded. At last, the king fearing that his daughter would grow into an old maid, announced her Swayamvara,* and sent invitations to all the princes he knew to attend the ceremony.

When all the royal suitors were assembled in the great Swayamvara hall, decorated for the occasion like Indra's court, Pratimati, dressed in resplendent robes and adorned with glittering jewels, entered the hall with a companion who introduced to her each of the suitors by name and title. Pratimati stated a proposition to each suitor and affirmed it; she then challenged the suitor to deny it. If the suitor was in favour of the affirmation she would deny it. An argument naturally followed, but none of the suitors could defeat her though she put a

* For Swayamvara see page 11

fresh proposition to each one. At last the princess left the hall with her companion, unable to find a prince who was superior to her in learning and polemics.

After the princess had left the assembly, king Jitasatru, in sheer despair, announced throughout the city that none of the invited princes could defeat the princess in argument, and any man, irrespective of caste or lineage, could come forward, argue with the princess and marry her if he proved to be her superior in polemics. It was while the crier was going round the streets that prince Aparijata happened to enter the city with his companion. Without a moment's delay he rode straight to the palace in his tattered, travel worn clothes, looking more like a tramp than a prince. He entered the Swayamvara hall while the royal suitors were still there, and announced himself as a candidate for the hand of the princess. Presently, Pratimati re-entered the hall. Seeing Aparijata she felt unknown emotions surging up in her; for in former lives the two were man and wife.

The princess now put her proposition to the princely suitor and affirmed it. Aparijata vigorously denied it, and a brilliant argument followed in which, to the amazement of all, the miserable looking stranger, by his vast learning and irrefutable logic, parried every argument put forward by the princess who began to fumble and stutter. Eventually Pratimati was silenced. She placed the wedding garland on the neck of Aparijata and accepted him as her husband.

This revolted the other royal suitors. They would not, they declared, permit

the princess to be married to a man from nowhere, as it was an insult to their royal status. The man to be wedded to a Kshatriya lady, they loudly asserted, was not to be a beggar, whatever his intellectual attainments but had to prove his prowess in arms as befitting the husband of a princess. Thus clamouring they drew their swords. Aparijata too unsheathed his sword and by performing prodigious feats of valour defeated them.

'Are you now satisfied that I am no coward?' asked the prince.

When both Jitasatru and his guests stood amazed, Vimalabodha announced that the prince was Aparijata, son of king Harinandin of Simhapuri.

'O my beloved son-in-law!' exclaimed Jitasatru, 'you are certainly worthy of my friend Harinandin. I had, in fact, sent him an invitation for the Swayamvara, but he had replied stating that due to the absence of his son from the kingdom he could not leave Simhapuri... Now, Aparijata, you have more than represented my friend, your father!'

Just at that moment a messenger who had been sent by Harinandin to search for his missing son, arrived on the scene and begged the prince to return to his father.

'I have delayed my return too long, far too long,' said the prince, 'and now I must go back to my sorrowing father and mother.'

Aparijata then started, with Pratimati, for Simhapuri with a fitting escort. On the way he visited the kingdoms of his other wives and with them reached the city of Simhapuri to the delight of his parents and the citizens.

14

THE LEWD ASCETIC AND THE MERCHANT'S DAUGHTER

From Katha Sarit Sagara. For this work see story No. 11

ON THE OUTSKIRTS of the city of Makandika, on the bank of the Ganges, there lived an ascetic who practised piety by day and indulged in licence by night. From the offerings he received from his followers, he lived the life of a libertine in secret, but in public he affected great contempt for the pleasures of the world, and thus deceived the credulous.

One day when he went on his usual routine round of begging in the city, he came to the house of a wealthy merchant, a firm believer in the religious merit of the ascetic. Here, with half-closed eyes he waited for alms. Presently, the young daughter of the merchant, a charming vivacious maiden, brought him food and cash, and the ascetic, seeing her, sighed and exclaimed: 'Ah! Ah! Alas!!'

The ascetic had vowed himself to silence while begging, and the merchant, hearing the holy man sigh and break his vow, felt surprised and asked him: 'Holy Sir, never while going

on your round of begging have you broken your vow of silence. Hence why did you exclaim now "Ah! Ah! Alas!!" Has aught of dire import come to the knowledge of your omniscience?'

On this the cunning ascetic called the merchant aside and said: 'You are my most devoted adherent, and it pains me to say that misfortune is at your door-step.'

The anxious merchant asked for further light, and the ascetic, making a show of sorrow, answered him: 'Your daughter is a pretty girl, but alas! she is destined to bring about your ruin. There is a clear inauspicious mark on her neck, and it is a sure sign of calamity for the person in whose house she resides.'

The merchant was greatly grieved on hearing this ominous warning; he had, in fact, already had certain reverses in trade of late, and the coincidence firmly convinced him that his daughter's evil destiny was at work on

the fortunes of his household. So he asked the ascetic: 'Holy Sir, what shall I do to avert the ruin of my house?'

The mendicant, after a pretext of concentration and communion with the Infinite, said in measured tones: 'There is a remedy, but it is a painful

one. You have to abandon your unlucky daughter! The scriptures permit this, as self-preservation is the law of life; everything is lawful to save oneself when one's life and property are threatened.... But it is sinful for a man to kill his own daughter, so I would advise you to put her in a large

reed basket and float it down the holy Ganges at night with a light on it; perchance some one might see the basket and save your daughter.' Having given this advice, the ascetic returned to his residence.

It pained the merchant to abandon his beloved daughter; but such was his implicit faith in the ascetic that he decided to carry out his instructions. So, that very night he got a large reed basket made, placed his daughter in it, and floated it down the Ganges with a lamp burning on it.

The voluptuous ascetic wished to enjoy the maiden that very night and impatiently waited for nightfall. As soon as the sun had set, he called two of his trusted disciples and told them: 'I have prescience of some-



thing strange happening tonight. Go to the bank of the holy Ganges immediately and watch for a basket with a light on it floating down the river. When you see it, rush forth into the stream, lay hold of the basket and bring it ashore. Do not open the basket even if you hear noises within it, but handle it gently and bring it to me without causing any damage.'

The disciples, thus instructed, went to carry out their master's instructions and kept vigil by the bank of the river.

In the meantime, the prince of a distant country had come to the Ganges on a pilgrimage and had pitched his camp, with his retinue, under a spreading tree, not far from the site where the merchant had abandoned his daughter. Seeing the unusual sight of a basket floating

down the river with a lighted lamp on it, the prince becoming curious asked his men to swim across and tow the basket ashore. He was immediately obeyed, and when the basket was brought to him and opened, the young prince was not a little surprised to find a lovely maiden in it. He took her for a river nymph, but she explained that she was a merchant's daughter, abandoned by her father in this manner on the advice of a sage. Her speech, manners and looks stirred the heart of the prince, and he thought she would be a fit person to be his bride; and so the two married themselves according to the Gandharva rite*, permissible to princes. Suspecting, however, some foul play, the

* For Gandharva rite see page 23



prince ordered his men to catch a fierce monkey that was sleeping on the tree; when the beast was caught, he put it in the basket and floated it down the river with the lamp burning on it as before.

The ascetic's men lying in wait for it now saw the basket drifting down the river as foretold by their master and seized it. They carried it to the ascetic, wondering what a great man he was to have foreknowledge of such unusual happenings.

The ascetic was, after a refreshing bath, anxiously waiting for the arrival of the basket, and he asked his disciples to carry it carefully upstairs to his private room and leave it there.

After the wondering disciples had left, the holy debauchee donned the clothes of a gallant and, oiled and curled, went upstairs to his private room. Closing all doors and windows, lest the cry of the girl should be heard outside in case she rejected his ad-

vances and yelled for help, the ascetic gently opened the lid of the basket. And out leapt from it the ferocious beast. The monkey violently attacked the ascetic, mauling and biting the scoundrel, and his cries for help went unheeded as none could hear him because of the bolted windows and doors. Chased by the monkey all over the room, the ascetic, half dead, managed to gain the door of the room and opened it; he fled downstairs for dear life, with the monkey in hot chase, which brought the whole neighbourhood to his place.

Enquiries were now initiated and the merchant's daughter was discovered in the camp of the prince. The ascetic was thoroughly exposed; his disciples left him and he was hounded out of the city by a howling mob.

The merchant, finding how he had been tricked by the villainous voluptuary, cursed him and blessed his daughter and her royal husband.

15

DRAUPADI AND KICHAKA

From the Mahabharata. For this work see stories No. 2 and 3. In the game of dice between the Kauravas and the Pandavas, the heroes of the epic, the latter lost, and according to the wager, the five Pandava princes had to spend twelve years in exile in the forests, and the thirteenth anywhere incognito; if they were detected and identified in the thirteenth year, they had to go into exile again for a further period of thirteen years as a forfeit. So the five princes and their common wife, Draupadi, after spending the stipulated period of twelve years in the forests, assumed various disguises and took service under Virata, king of the Matsyas. Yudhishtira, the eldest of the princes, under the guise of a learned Brahmin, got employed as an adviser to the king; Bhima, giant of a man, became cook in the royal kitchen; Arjuna, who had been transformed into a eunuch by a curse, was employed as dancing master to princess Uttara and her maids; and the twins, Nakula and Sahadeva, worked as superintendents of the stables and cattle pens. Draupadi applied to queen Sudeshna for a situation as Sairandhri or lady-in-waiting, was called for an interview and appeared before the queen.

QUEEN SUDESHNA studied the physiognomy of Draupadi, and carefully observed her from head to foot. She was an expert in Samudrika Sastra, the science of auspicious marks, and saw on Draupadi all the signs of royalty and none of servility. So she said to Draupadi: 'Young lady, I can see in you none of the marks of the servile. Your face is like the autumn moon, your waist is slender, and navel, deep-set. Your voice is resonant like the notes of the Koll. Your dainty heels are not meant to tread and

strain, and your soles and face are ruddy; your shapely thighs do not touch each other and your neck bears the triple line of the conch-shell. Your eyes resemble the lotus, and breasts are full, rounded and elevated. You are, by all these royal marks, fit to be a queen and I don't know how you have come to me seeking service!'

On this Draupadi told the queen that she was in the service of the queen of a distant country and was living in a palace in the midst of luxury; that misfortune had overtaken

her mistress and her husband and, driven out of their kingdom by a hostile, they were forced to wander in strange lands and inhospitable regions; and that, in the end, she was asked to leave them and so came now to the kingdom of the Matsyas. Draupadi gave her name as Malini.

Though she pitied Malini, Sudeshna was reluctant to take her into her service as the duties of a Sairandhri included, among other things, preparation of unguents and flower garlands for the king, and Sudeshna thought it would be imprudent to let the king feast his eyes on such a flaming beauty as Malini. Yet she could very well see that the applicant would be a desirable adornment to her establishment. Malini, moreover, did not appear the gay and frivolous type that would easily fall for men; so she decided to take her into her service with a warning against levity. She frankly told Malini that she was prepared to give her a situation as Sairandhri but she should conduct herself with propriety especially as the king, she confided, had a weakness for women.

On this Malini assured the queen that she was a chaste lady, spiritually married to five powerful Gandharvas* who always hovered around her and kept a strict watch over her activities, and they could be depended upon to prevent any one molesting her. On Malini giving this assurance, Sudeshna took her into her service as her Sairandhri.

Now Sudeshna had a brother called Kichaka who was the commander-in-

chief of the armed forces of the kingdom. He was an ambitious and powerful individual. Kichaka was, in fact, the virtual ruler of the Matsyas and practically all the affairs of State were settled by him in consultation with Sudeshna; Virata, who loved peace, never went against their wishes or decisions.

One day, when Kichaka visited Sudeshna in her palace, he happened to see Malini. The beauty and royal bearing of the lady excited his passion, and he was considerably relieved to learn that she was the Sairandhri of his sister, as women in the seraglio were not particularly noted for their virtue and his sister could be depended upon to help him get Malini for his pleasure. So he took Sudeshna into his confidence and told her of his love for Malini; as was but expected, Sudeshna raised no objections but asked him to approach Malini direct as she was likely to be greatly impressed by him, and his power, wealth and fame. But when Kichaka sought Malini and tried to court her, she rejected him and said that she was the chaste wife of five Gandharvas who always looked after her. This protest of chastity only amused Kichaka, but Malini persistently spurned his suit. Kichaka, however, did not consider the time opportune for pressing his point and waited for a more favourable occasion. Time, he thought, would soften Malini.

But time did not soften her. In fact, Draupadi studiously avoided Kichaka, and when they happened to meet in the queen's palace, which Kichaka now visited frequently, she was cold and unresponsive. Failing to impress Draupadi and make her yield to him,

* For Gandharvas, see page 2



Kichaka decided to canvass his sister's aid to ensnare his victim. The evil brother and sister plotted together and it was agreed between them that Malini should be sent on some frivolous errand to Kichaka's mansion from where it would be impossible for her to escape.

Accordingly, one day when Sudeshna had to send some choice wines to Kichaka's mansion, she detailed Malini to carry these to her brother from the royal cellar. Malini now told her mistress that she was frightened of Kichaka as he had on several occasions made indecent overtures to her, and requested that the task of taking the wines to Kichaka should be relegated to some one else.

'Have no misgivings on that account,' assured Sudeshna; 'for out of respect for me my brother would desist from any designs he may be having about you. So take the wines to his mansion without fear or delay; I cannot entrust this important work to any one else.'

Thus pressed by the queen, Malini took the wines to Kichaka's palace. When he saw her, Kichaka who had been impatiently waiting for her arrival, addressed her passionately: 'Today, my dear Malini, I have you. Mine is not a passing fancy for a girl of the harem, but abiding love. Submit to me, and you shall be my wedded wife and the virtual queen of the Matsyas; for you must be knowing well enough by now that I am the real king of the Matsyas and Virata is a mere puppet in my hands. So lovely lady, this is as much your chance as mine.'

Draupadi was now really frightened. She was alone in his residence, and it became clear to her that Sudeshna

was a tool in Kichaka's hands. Further, Kichaka appeared drunk and in a violent mood that would stop at nothing. But of one thing she was determined; whatever happened, she would not yield to him. So she told Kichaka once again that she was a chaste wedded woman, and would rather give up her life than her honour. This rejection maddened Kichaka, and when the villain advanced to seize her by force, Draupadi screamed and fled. Kichaka was in no mood to let his prey escape, and he chased her. Hotly pursued by the infuriated Kichaka, Draupadi ran to the palace of Virata where the king, with his counsellors, was giving public audience. Kichaka, maddened by lust, forgetting all sense of decency and decorum, rushed after her to the court, seized her and when she resisted, kicked and knocked her down. The confused courtiers and counsellors now intervened, brought Kichaka to his senses and sent Malini back to the seraglio.

The spirited Draupadi had no other thought now but of revenge. The terrible insult and humiliation had to be avenged, and avenged in blood. So she sought her second husband Bhima, who was working in Virata's kitchen as his cook; of all her husbands, Bhima alone, she felt, had the muscular strength for the deed she had in view.

Draupadi took Bhima to a solitary place and narrated to him all that had happened. Shedding tears, she recounted to him her sorrows: 'I am born a princess, and was the pet of my famous father, king of the Panchalas, and the jewel of my clan! But my high birth has been my undoing.



For were I born low and poor, my sorrow had been less! Wedded to five noble princes of the lunar race, I have suffered insult and injury at the hands of wicked men, the kind of humiliation even the poorest of the poor would resent. I was insulted by the vile Duryodhana, as no respectable woman ever had been: as you know and as all the world knows, I was denuded in public, on his orders, by his ribald brother, the savage Dussasana. Then I had to wander in the wild forests as an exile, like the destitute daughter of some barbarous forest-dweller. In exile again I was abducted by the wicked Jayadratha and insulted. And now to crown my misery I was chased by a drunken debauchee into the court of Virata and there kicked by the murderous villain in the presence of my own husband Yudhishtira, who did not raise his little finger to defend me. Has any woman ever had the misfortune to be tossed about thus by a cruel fate? And what is worse, I have daily to suffer the sight of the degradation of my husbands: Yudhishtira, my eldest husband who had ruled an empire, sits in the assembly of the imbecile Virata chanting, like a low sycophant, his praises. And you Bhima, mighty as the wind-god thy father, drudges in Virata's kitchen, laying and blowing the fire, mincing meat and cutting cucumber, while Arjuna whose arrows distressed the mighty Shiva himself, plays the clown in Virata's harem, leaping, like a performing baboon, for the amusement of his idle women! And Nakula and Sahadeva, my youngest husbands, work as stable boys for Virata! Can a woman be ever put to greater indignities?

And today, to complete my wretchedness, I was chased, dragged and kicked by the vile Kichaka in an open court in presence of my eldest husband, who sat watching my disgrace with philosophic calm! And you, Bhima, are making haste to prepare dainty dishes for my ravisher who fattens on Sudeshna's indulgence! Oh, how I wish I were never born!!'

Thus worked up, the fierce Bhima swore that he would avenge Draupadi's insult that very night, and before the sun rose next morning he would dance on the dead body of the wicked Kichaka.

Bhima and Draupadi now worked out a plan for the destruction of Kichaka that night. She was asked by Bhima to fix an appointment in the night with her ravisher in the dancing hall of the palace and Bhima undertook to do the rest.

Without much difficulty, Draupadi managed to fix up a secret appointment with Kichaka. For this worthy, after his behaviour in the court of Virata, came to Draupadi to proffer apologies. He told her that he had lost his mental balance by her rejection of his suit and that itself, he pointed out, was proof of the depth of his passion for her. Nor did he fail to warn her that resistance to his will would be futile, in as much as he was, Kichaka asserted, the real ruler of the Matsyas and neither Virata and his ministers nor the queen herself could do anything against him. Finally, he dwelt upon the advantages she could gain by yielding to him, and he promised to marry her and make her his chief wife.

Draupadi took full advantage of the situation. She pretended to repent of

her rash rejection of his suit which had led to all the trouble. She did not then know, she said, how powerful Kichaka was, but in the light of what had happened, she feigned conviction of his overwhelming might and declared that her Gandharva husbands themselves were powerless against him, as they had obviously watched helplessly when she was dragged about and kicked in Virata's court. She said she did not care any more for these imbeciles, and would be glad to marry the powerful Kichaka and settle down as his principal wife. In fact, she expressed her desire to marry him that very night.

'But I am frightened to go to your mansion lest gossip should spread slander... For the Kshatriyas, as you know, the secret Gandharva form of marriage is permitted by law-givers and we must get married according to this rite and consummate our nuptials this very night. And the best place we can repair to, I think, is the dancing hall of the palace; tonight there will be no rehearsals and as the night spreads her protecting wings over the palace, I will meet you there.'

Kichaka was delighted. He even congratulated himself on his brutish behaviour that day as his show of strength seemed to have brought about Draupadi's conversion in his favour so suddenly. He assured Draupadi that he would not be late for his appointment that night, and departed. And Draupadi promptly informed Bhima of the appointment she had fixed up with her ravisher in the dancing hall of the palace.

At nightfall Bhima quietly slipped away from the kitchen and making sure

that none was watching him, warily proceeded to the dancing hall and here waited for Kichaka to come. As the lights in the palace went out one by one, the vigilant Bhima heard the footsteps of the bridegroom approaching the dancing hall. He now crawled and hid himself under the bed Draupadi had prepared for Kichaka, lest the bridegroom strike a tinder in the dark and see him. And as Kichaka groped his way in and came near the bed, Bhima fell upon him like a lion and strangled him. The rape of Draupadi had made Bhima mad with rage, and he worked his fury on the body of Kichaka, smashed every one of his bones, and left the corpse a mangled mass of flesh and blood. After this, Bhima went back in the dark to the kitchen, unseen by any one.

In the morning, when Kichaka's corpse was discovered in the dancing hall, there was panic in the palace. The news spread throughout the city, and Kichaka's friends and partisans thronged to the palace. All wondered and wanted to know who the killer was. Draupadi herself now declared that her Gandharva husbands must have done this to avenge her; the way the corpse was mangled bore conviction, as no human agency was thought capable of such great muscular strength.

Anyway, it was clear to everyone that Draupadi was the root cause of Kichaka's death, and the friends of the deceased decided to kill her. 'If this Sairandhri had not come to the court of Virata,' they argued, 'Kichaka would not have seen her and loved her, and he would not have been killed by her Gandharva husbands. Therefore Malini is responsible for the foul death of

the redoubtable Kichaka, who did not even have time to draw his sword and die fighting like a man and a soldier. So Malini must die.' Some of Kichaka's friends were for killing her on the spot, while the more imaginative wanted her to be burnt alive with his corpse. In the end, the opinion of the latter prevailed, and Draupadi was seized, bound to a bier and taken in procession, along with the dead body of Kichaka, to the cremation ground.

Bhima, who had been carefully watching the proceedings, went ahead of the cortege to the cremation ground and disguising himself as a flying Gandharva hid himself in the foliage of a tree that stood in a deserted place on the way to the cremation ground. As the procession came

and the bier carrying Draupadi was passing under the tree, he fell upon the bier-carriers with a terrible roar. Panic seized the procession as the furious assailant appeared like a being from the nether regions, and all fled to save themselves from his infernal wrath, leaving the bier under the tree. On this Bhima loosened the cords that bound Draupadi and released her. And before any one could muster enough courage to come to the spot, the two escaped into the forests.

(The thirteenth year of exile, it may be mentioned, was over with this event. The Pandavas now revealed their identity and Virata, coming to know who his employees were, condoned the killing of Kichaka and befriended them).

16

THE BITER BAWD BIT

From Katha Sarit Sagara; see story No. 11

IN THE CITY of Chitrakuta there lived a wealthy merchant named Ratnavarman who had no children. He propitiated Shiva, and by the god's favour, a son was born to him. He named him Isvaravarman.

As Isvaravarman grew into manhood Ratnavarman wished to educate him in all the arts and sciences. He was first instructed in letters and then in the science of acquiring wealth, the traditional occupation of the family. Finally, he was taught the use of weapons of offence and defence by competent teachers.

But Ratnavarman did not consider the youth's education complete with these. The merchant was ageing, and Isvaravarman had to travel to many foreign lands; hence Ratnavarman thought that his son should have some knowledge of the ways of courtesans, who thrive on wealthy young men, so that Isvaravarman would not fall into their snares and thus lose his wealth and good name. With this end in view he commissioned the most noted bawd of the city, a wealthy old crone named

Yamajihwa, to instruct Isvaravarman in the art of seduction and the use of counter-measures against it.

Isvaravarman took lessons from the bawd for a full year, and Yamajihwa assured Ratnavarman that his son had obtained proficiency in the profession of the prostitute, could be sent out anywhere in the world and depended upon to combat and evade the cunning of the most wily courtesan.

So at the age of eighteen, Isvaravarman was asked to go to the distant Suvarnabhumi where Ratnavarman had extensive trade connections; by way of capital for buying merchandise, the young man was given an initial amount of five crores. As an adviser to his son, Ratnavarman sent with him his trusted employee, the elderly Arthadatta, efficient in the management of business and shrewd in dealing with men.

Journeying towards Suvarnabhumi, Isvaravarman and Arthadatta came to the famed city of Kanchanapura where lived Sundari, a courtesan, reckoned the jewel of the city. On seeing here,

Isvaravarman was seized with a desire to make her acquaintance and, if possible, test the theories Yamajihwa had taught him and find out for himself their practical value. With this object, he visited Sundari's palatial establishment in the city.

Sundari's alluring ways and the splendour of her establishment fascinated the young merchant, and the two days spent with her passed off like two minutes. Isvaravarman paid her two lakhs for the two days, but Sundari protested that she would take no money from him, as she considered his company a greater pleasure to her

than hers to him and if any payment was needed it was she, and not he, who ought to pay. Isvaravarman, however, insisted that she should take the money and Makarakati, Sundari's mother, persuaded her in his presence to accept the amount as her lover was obviously getting offended; further, Makarakati pointed out, as Sundari and Isvaravarman had become one body and soul in two days, his wealth was hers and her wealth his, and there was absolutely no point in arguing and bargaining about her money, his money, and paltry payments. But Sundari was determined not to accept



the money, the young lover was as determined to pay, and so the money was finally taken by the bawd on behalf of Sundari who declared that cash vitiated love and she would not touch it.

So Sundari and Isvaravarman lived together in each other's love, and when the young merchant broached the subject of his departure for Suvarnabhumi, Sundari declared she would die of a broken heart if he went away from her and would, in order to prevent this, commit suicide. This made Isvaravarman stay back. Besides, in the enchanted atmosphere of Sundari's palace, with its fascinating music and dancing, charming young girls, pictures, fountains and pleasure groves, and the choicest of wines and viands, Isvaravarman felt that there were greater things in life than trading in Suvarnabhumi. So in spite of the repeated efforts of Arthadatta to wean his young protege from the siren of Kanchanapura, Isvaravarman lived in Sundari's house turning a deaf ear to all of Arthadatta's wise counsels.

A period of two months in Sundari's house passed off like a couple of hours for Isvaravarman, and with it went two out of the five crores. At this point, Arthadatta felt that something effective had to be done to save the remaining three crores, by awakening the young man to a sense of his duty to his father and to himself. When Arthadatta tried to lecture to Isvaravarman on the wiles of courtesans, Isvaravarman maintained that while courtesans as a class were vile, Sundari was an exception and loved him more than her life. When he told Isvaravarman that their money was fast run-

ning out, the young man stated that money given to Sundari was as good as a safe deposit, and she would give back what was given her on his asking for it and even more if the need arose; when Arthadatta, in despair, warned Isvaravarman that the courtesan, after draining him of his wealth, would throw him out like a sucked lemon, the young man lost his temper and called him an old fool who did not understand the power of the imperishable bond of love. At his wit's end, Arthadatta preached to him the duties of a son and pointed out to him the difficulty of explaining to his father this inordinate delay at Kanchanapura where they had no business; he pleaded that they should go to Suvarnabhumi so that he could send to Ratnavarman report of their arrival; after they had taken in hand the business they had in Suvarnabhumi, Isvaravarman, if he so desired, could come back to Kanchanapura, Arthadatta said. This advice seemed reasonable to Isvaravarman and he reluctantly consented to do what Arthadatta had suggested. But the difficulty was about breaking the news to Sundari who, Isvaravarman feared, would collapse on hearing it; so Arthadatta undertook the task of persuading Sundari and her mother to let Isvaravarman proceed to Suvarnabhumi.

Accordingly, Arthadatta and Isvaravarman went to Sundari's house and the former, after dwelling upon the circumstances the young man was placed in and his obligations to his father, gently told Sundari and her mother that it was imperative that Isvaravarman should go to Suvarnabhumi, and he promised on oath that after

reaching their destination and finishing their allotted task, he would send Isvaravarman back to Kanchanapura. On this Sundari burst out into tears and cried that she would jump onto a pyre and put an end to herself immediately on Isvaravarman's departure; but Arthadatta consoled her with many a soothing word, pointing out to her that even the most devoted wife would allow her husband to leave her on business; and Isvaravarman, he explained, was going to Suvarnabhumi to gain wealth and attendant fame for the two of them, and would shortly return to her. On this the bawd Makarakati told Sundari that she should yield to the wise Arthadatta's request and let Isvaravarman go to Suvarnabhumi, however painful to her the separation might be; the old bawd felt that Arthadatta was bent upon taking the young man who was himself in a mood to go. After a good deal of sobbing and coaxing, in the end, under pressure from all the three, Sundari gave Isvaravarman permission to go to Suvarnabhumi and it was decided that he should start the very next day.

But the bawd and her daughter did not wish to let Isvaravarman go before stripping him of the remaining three crores. Hence that very night Makarakati ordered her trusted servants to proceed to a well on the route of Isvaravarman's journey and spread a strong net three cubits below the water level, so that the net while invisible from above could prevent a person who fell into the well from sinking. And the servants faithfully carried out her instructions.

Next morning when Isvaravarman and his retinue came to take farewell

of his love, Sundari, with tears running down her pretty cheeks and sighing like a furnace, pleaded, sobbing, that she should be permitted to accompany her lover to the outskirts of the city with her mother and servants. This was readily agreed to, for Isvaravarman himself wanted to be near his beloved as long as he could. So Sundari, wearing the plain white clothes of a woman in mourning and without any ornaments, went with Isvaravarman along the road, the two exchanging mutual protestations of love and cursing the cruel fate that was separating them. On passing the well and reaching the city limits, the bawd said that they should now return; Sundari embraced Isvaravarman and the latter taking her in his arms kissed her passionately. At last Sundari, wailing aloud, tore herself away from him; then gloomily returning she ran to the well as if seized by a mad frenzy, and jumped into it.

All of them now rushed towards the well, and before Isvaravarman could reach it, a sturdy servant had jumped into it and Sundari was hauled up by an improvised rope made of clothes. When she was laid on the bare ground, Sundari was apparently unconscious and Isvaravarman wailed over her still body, cursing the cruel Arthadatta who had caused her death. But Sundari did not die, and the first word she uttered on regaining consciousness was the name of Isvaravarman!

No need to say that Isvaravarman now gave up all thoughts of leaving Sundari. The two gay birds lived together without a care, and Arthadatta could do nothing about it. Even this wise man, after the tragedy of the well, was beginning to feel that there

was some truth in what Isvaravarman said and that the young Sundari was really enamoured of his master's handsome son. All told, poor Arthadatta felt helpless like a reed in the west wind, and he left his fortune and that of his master to the whims of fate.

Well, the three crôres ran out in another three months, when Sundari and Makarakati thought that it was time for Isvaravarman to proceed to Suvarnabhumi like a dutiful son, as directed by his father. When Isvaravarman said that all his cash was spent, and he would be obliged to borrow some money from them, both mother and daughter told him curtly for his information that they were not in the money-lending business! Further, Sundari started taking new lovers, ignoring Isvaravarman; when the youth protested, he was rudely told that if he did not like it, he could cheese it, and the door was wide open for him to quit any time he wished to. And when the fool still clung to Sundari like a leech, her servants were asked to throw him out of the house.

Thus spat out like a chunk of chewed sugar-cane, poor Isvaravarman returned to his lodgings, and Arthadatta found that they did not have enough money either to go to Suvarnabhumi or return to Chitrakuta. In this predicament, he sent a messenger to Ratnavarman with a letter explaining all that had happened, and stating that they were stranded in Kanchanapura without a pie on them. On receiving the letter, Ratnavarman immediately sent them sufficient money to help them reach home, and Isvaravarman with Arthadatta at last returned to Chitrakuta.

Ratnavarman loved his son too well to be angry with him for his folly. The man was young, and the nets laid by the courtesan were far-flung; he had already foreseen the danger and had him instructed in the art, craft and wiles of courtesans, and he now felt that the young man's education under Yamajihwa was inadequate. He put the blame for his son's ruin on his tutor. So Ratnavarman went to the bawd and thus reviled her: 'I told you to keep my son under instruction as long as you wanted and never stinted in paying you. Only after you assured me of his ability to combat the seductive art of the courtesan, did I take my son away from you. Now I find that the young man was seduced and ruined by a courtesan of Kanchanapura, and I charge you with negligence of duty. If you do not give me all the money my son lost in Kanchanapura, I will bring an action against you before the king.'

Hearing this, Yamajihwa asked for details of Isvaravarman's adventures in Kanchanapura, and after listening attentively to the sorrowful tale, she admitted: 'Yes, it is true that I did not warn Isvaravarman of the guileful use of nets in wells by courtesans. I am, without doubt, to blame in this case, and I am prepared to make reparations; I shall not only get back for you all the wealth Sundari had seized, but shall reduce her to the same position she reduced your son, without any hope of recovery.'

Yamajihwa now called a servant girl and asked her to bring from her menagerie, the trained monkey Ala, and requested the merchant to send for his son and Arthadatta. They came and in their presence, she gave the monkey

a thousand gold pieces which the animal promptly swallowed. When Yamajihwa told the animal to give her a hundred pieces, the monkey spat out exactly a hundred; when she asked for two hundred, the monkey produced two hundred.

'Now take this monkey with you,' said Yamajihwa to Isvaravarman, 'and make it swallow as many gold coins you wish, and it will bring out the number you ask for. Go with the monkey to Sundari and she will barter away all her wealth for Ala.'

Isvaravarman took the monkey and with the good Arthadatta travelled once again to Kanchanapura. He appeared before Sundari in grand style, and ordered a great feast to celebrate his return. Sundari and Makarakati saw that the young man had somehow retrieved his fortune and were hence all courtesy and deference. But they were not sure that he had all the money they wished for, and remarked that a feast of the type he ordered would cost near about a hundred pieces of gold. On this, Isvaravarman, affecting a casual manner, asked Arthadatta to bring the monkey Ala, and ordered the ape to give him two hundred gold coins. He had already made it swallow a thousand, and the monkey promptly produced the two hundred, which Isvaravarman gave to Makarakati. 'You may spend the hundred for the feast and keep the balance,' he said with the air of a man who had money to burn.

When Makarakati and Sundari saw that the monkey produced any amount of gold coins for the asking, their cupidity was thoroughly roused, and they wished to obtain for themselves the

gold-spitting animal. 'If we could only get this monkey,' they said to each other, 'we can shut up shop and live comfortably for the rest of our lives.'

So, one day, after she had worked up Isvaravarman by cajolery and blandishments, Sundari asked him if he would, by any chance, forget her past misconduct; she blamed the cupidity of her old mother for the rupture between them. 'The old moneybag,' said Sundari, 'would never let me live with any person I really love.'

Isvaravarman, having learnt a bitter lesson from past experience, knew well what the harlot was after, and hence made light of her past misconduct. 'Let bygones be bygones,' he said with careless abandon, hugging and kissing her; 'why do you want to spoil



our bliss by reminding me of the unpleasant past?’

Sundari now felt that the young man had again started eating out of her hand, and she could safely broach the subject of buying the monkey. So lolling in his lap and passing her arms round him, she asked Isvaravarman if he would care to sell his ape to her.

‘What, sell Alai’ he exclaimed, and affecting the ways of a gallant, added: ‘My sweetheart, this animal is a gift from the goddess Kali whom my father had propitiated. And he has given it to me only after I assured him that I would not part with it under any condition whatsoever. Besides, as you have already seen, the animal can produce any amount of money for the asking; then what sense would there be in my selling it for money?’

Sundari then insisted that he should give her the animal for love, and he could take back all the money he had given her; in fact, his full five crores. When Isvaravarman rejected this suggestion, she raised the offer still higher and promised to give him all her wealth, including her jewellery. At this point, Arthadatta interceded on behalf of Sundari; he requested Isvaravarman to sell the monkey to her, for love’s sake, if not for the money, and added that they could

spread a report that the monkey had been stolen or had escaped. At the persistent pleadings of Arthadatta, after a great show of reluctance Isvaravarman finally gave the monkey to Sundari in exchange of her entire wealth. And after collecting all her cash, ornaments, and even furniture and metal vessels, a caravan plodded its way to Chitrakuta, headed by Isvaravarman and Arthadatta.

As soon as Isvaravarman had departed, Sundari asked the monkey for a hundred gold coins which it promptly spat out. But it had only some five hundred coins left in its system, and when this was used up the monkey was unable to produce any more gold. Makarakati and Sundari thought that it was due to its perversity that the monkey refused to bring out gold coins as they demanded, and so caught the beast and started beating it. The animal flew into a rage, and scratched and bit the two women till their servants rushed to their help. In their effort to save Sundari and Makarakati, the servants beat the monkey to death.

The wounds and bruises caused by the monkey on the face and body of Sundari permanently disfigured her and rendered her useless for her profession, and she had to live in penury and want for the rest of her life. Such are the fruits of evil.

17

SRINGABHUJA AND RUPASIKHA

A fairy tale from Katha Sarit Sagara

VIRABHUJA, THE VIRTUOUS and noble king of Vardhamana, had a hundred wives, of whom Gunavara was the most beautiful and loyal. She was ever devoted to her husband, accompanied him wherever he went and shared with him all his religious vows and other pious obligations.

The king had no sons. And in order to obtain sons, Virabhuja consulted his able physician Srutavardhana, an adept in the preparation of potent potions, who asked him to procure a wild goat. The king gave orders to his huntsmen to get one, and with difficulty they managed to capture a wild goat. Srutavardhana made a soup from the flesh of the goat and charging it with fertility-producing spells gave it to the queens.

Now it happened that when the soup was served to the queens, Gunavara was away with the king to perform certain religious duties, and her absence was not noticed by the physician. As a result, when Gunavara returned with the king, both were distressed to find that all the soup had been con-

sumed by the ninety-nine other wives of the king and nothing was left for Gunavara. When the physician discovered his error, a frantic search was made for any remaining part of the flesh of the wild goat, but the cook could produce only the horns of the animal. From these Srutavardhana carefully prepared a soup, mixed it with magic herbs, and queen Gunavara drank the mixture.

In due course, the ninety-nine queens conceived and had a son each; after the birth of these children, Gunavara also became pregnant and she gave birth to a resplendent boy, and the boy was named Sringabhuja.

All the hundred princes were brought up together and Sringabhuja excelled his half-brothers in games and in the use of the bow and arrows. The king felt particularly happy to see his youngest son grow up in beauty, strength and valour, and he loved Gunavara all the more as the mother of his favourite son.

Now the other wives of Virabhuja were jealous of Gunavara and her son

Sringabhuja; and Ayasolekha, the chief among them, felt particularly unhappy as she had ambitions of monopolizing the king's attention and seeing her son Nirvasabhuja proclaimed heir-apparent. So she worked on the jealousy of the neglected wives of Virabhuja, and the ninety-nine queens hatched a plot among themselves to bring about the ruin of Gunavara and her son.

Accordingly, Ayasolekha one day sought a private audience with the king on the plea that she had important news to communicate to him. When she was alone with the king, the queen with a show of much concern for the good name of the king and his royal house thus addressed him: 'I am very much grieved, Your Majesty, by what transpires in the seraglio in your absence. The moment your back is turned, Surakshita, the young chamberlain, is seen with queen Gunavara. Till now I did not tell you this lest it should upset you, but now things have gone so far that everybody in the palace talks about it. Hence I felt that as a well-wisher of my husband, it is my unpleasant duty to tell you of this unfortunate affair.'

The king could hardly believe his ears; for he greatly loved Gunavara, and her apparent devotion to him had made him completely trust her. 'Anyway,' the king thought to himself, 'the mind of woman is unfathomable, and such things have happened in the harems of kings before. In fact, sages have declared that the professed sincerity and devotion of a woman are not to be believed by the discerning, and the prudent man must never trust a woman.... So I must make enqui-

ries in the matter.'

King Virabhuja accordingly made enquiries and all his wives and the servants of the harem whom he asked attested the tale of Ayasolekha.

'Alas!' the king sighed to himself; 'whether true or not, a scandal has spread in the harem and the city, and it does affect the good name of Gunavara and myself. For what greater evil can befall a king than that his subjects should consider his wife frivolous and faithless. Anyway, I do not wish to aggravate the scandal by public punishment of Surakshita or Gunavara. The situation should be handled with caution and tact.'

So Virabhuja called Surakshita to him in private and told him: 'We have received a confidential report that you killed a Brahmin, and it is clear to us that you need penance. So undertake a long pilgrimage to Kashmir, and visit all the shrines and bathe in all the sacred streams of that holy land. And then, cleansed of your sin, you may return to our kingdom.'

Surakshita protested that he had not killed any Brahmin, nor even a non-Brahmin, had always practised virtue and performed his duties most faithfully. But the king had made up his mind, and he knew that it was useless to argue with a king. So poor Surakshita donned the saffron robe of a pilgrim and departed to the distant land of Kashmir.

On his departure the king called to him Gunavara and told her with visible emotion: 'My dear wife, a holy man came to me today and predicted that an evil conjunction of stars threatens the safety of our kingdom and it can be averted only by a drastic action. It

involves, my dear Gunavara, your freedom and I don't know what exactly to do.'

'What is it?' asked Gunavara anxiously; 'speak out, my lord, without any hesitation. My freedom is nothing when compared with the prosperity and well-being of our kingdom, and I am prepared to sacrifice not only my freedom but my life itself for your welfare and for the good of our country. So, pray, make known to me what the sage has told you.'

On this the king, feigning much sorrow, told the queen that the sage had asked him to confine her in a cell till the evil influences threatened by the planets should pass.

'Is that all?' asked Gunavara much relieved; 'If my imprisonment should benefit our kingdom, I shall go to the dungeon as happily as a bride goes to her nuptial chamber. Pray call, my lord, the guards and let them conduct me to my cell.' The good king felt grieved to have his submissive wife imprisoned but he thought he had no alternative, and so he had her confined in a cell. Young Sringabhuja too asked the king why he had his mother shut up in a prison cell and the king told him also the same tale.

Ayasolekha and her ninety-eight co-wives were very happy about the success of their evil plot, but they felt that there was yet another thorn in their flesh. And this was prince Sringabhuja. The prince had now grown into a fine young man, and though the youngest of the king's sons, he often assumed the leadership of his half-brothers, in sports, tournaments and games with weapons. So Ayasolekha worked up her son Nirvasabhuja

against Sringabhuja and told him that it was necessary for him to remove his rival so that he could be installed as crown prince. Nirvasabhuja fell in with the proposals of his mother and steadily promoted his interests among his half-brothers, all of whom, inspired by jealousy of Sringabhuja, sided with him.

One day, while the hundred princes were playing outside the palace, they noticed a huge uncouth crane sitting on the roof of a temple. The princes were struck by the size and appearance of the ugly bird and stood gazing at it, when a mendicant appeared before them. 'That crane,' said he to the princes, 'is no bird; it is a Rakshasa or demon, who has assumed the form of a crane for love of mischief and has come to our country to do us harm. So kill him or so injure him that he may not come to our city again.'

On this, the princes started shooting at the bird. All of them, except Sringabhuja, had their bows and arrows, and every one of them on shooting missed the bird. 'None of you,' said the mendicant, 'has been able to injure or even scare the bird. Sringabhuja, I should think, is a good marksman, and he might be able to shoot the crane.'

Now Nirvasabhuja saw in the situation promise of a development by which he could get rid of Sringabhuja. 'I shall rush to the palace,' said he, turning to Sringabhuja, 'and fetch for you our father's bow and golden arrow.' So saying, he ran to the palace, brought the bow and arrow and gave them to Sringabhuja.

The prince took aim and shot, but the

arrow got stuck in the leg of the crane. The wounded bird flew off with the arrow, and Nirvasabhuja said, crying, that he would not go back to the palace without the arrow, as the king, his father, was sure to punish him; the other princes, all partisans of Nirvasabhuja, sided with him.

When Sringabhuja asked them what exactly they wanted him to do, the cunning Nirvasabhuja suggested: 'The best thing you can do now is to go on the track of the bird, and get the arrow from the place where the bird finally rests or dies.' He thought that by sending Sringabhuja to the crane's nest he would be sending him into death's jaws, as Rakshasas were notorious for their predilection for human flesh.

Sringabhuja decided to follow Nirvasabhuja's suggestion and get back the arrow. Guided by the trail of blood dropped from the crane's leg, he followed the bird. He travelled far, far into a thick jungle, and then into an impenetrable forest, away from all inhabited places he had seen or heard of. And, in the centre of this wild region stood a beautiful palace.

As Sringabhuja was standing at the palace gate wondering what place it could be, he saw a maiden of celestial loveliness approach him, smiling delightfully. The prince asked the enchanting maiden the name of that place, and wished to know how she had come to stay in a palace in such an unknown and wild region.

'This place,' answered the smiling beauty, 'is known as Dhumapura and my father Agnisikha is its king. And my name is Rupasikha.'

The princess who had taken a liking

to Sringabhuja, asked him what brought him to that place into which no man had strayed before, and the prince told her who he was and how he had come on the trail of the crane to regain the golden arrow.

'My father,' said Rupasikha sighing, 'at times does odd things. He loves to put on wings and go sightseeing in forbidden regions. He is the crane you wounded. Fortunately the wound is slight; our court physician will heal it in no time and you shall have your arrow back.'

Rupasikha was not, however, in a hurry to give back the arrow to the prince, but took him to the bowers, flower beds, lakes and streams of her woodland domain. The two loved each other's company, and Rupasikha said that she would take him to her father, and get married to him the very next day according to the prescribed rites. The prince was delighted with the proposal. So, Rupasikha took him to



her father, introduced him as the prince of Vardhamana, and said that they loved each other and would like to get married the next day.

Agnisikha did not approve of his daughter marrying and leaving his palace for a far country, but knowing how stubborn she was in such things, he told Sringabhuja: 'Young man, you shall certainly marry my daughter, but before marriage you must do certain things I bid you. Only if you perform my bidding to my satisfaction will I agree to bestow my daughter on you.' Sringabhuja wanted to marry Rupasikha at any cost and he promised Agnisikha that he would do whatever he commanded. On this, Agnisikha told Sringabhuja: 'Outside my palace is an extensive field and I shall give you a hundred Kharis* of sesame; you must plough the field and sow the seeds today, and tomorrow you can marry my daughter.'

The prince left Agnisikha with a heavy heart. He was not a farmer; besides, no farmer in the world could plough a field and sow a hundred Kharis of sesame in a day. But Rupasikha, when informed by the prince of her father's command, asked him to be of good cheer and she would do the impossible for him.

The princess produced hundreds of oxen and ploughmen by her magic, and had the field ploughed, and when Sringabhuja brought the seeds from Agnisikha, the field was ready for sowing. So he sowed the sesame in the field as needed, and went back to Agnisikha with news of the successful termination of the day's labour.

'Well, my boy,' said Agnisikha; 'you

have, indeed, done a wonderful thing. But I am sorry I made a mistake. Sesame will not grow in that soil, and so please go and collect all the grain you have sown and bring back the hundred Kharis I gave you, without loss of a single grain.'

On hearing this Sringabhuja was greatly depressed, but Rupasikha promised to do even this for him. She created armies of ants by her magic, and let them loose in the fields; the ants picked up every seed of sesame from the soil, and Sringabhuja duly took back to Agnisikha all the hundred Kharis he had been given without loss of a single grain. This wonderful feat, no doubt, greatly impressed Agnisikha but he did not still like to have him for a son-in-law and so told Sringabhuja: 'You have really earned a bride, and day after tomorrow you shall, without fail, marry my daughter; but tomorrow you must go to my brother Dhumasikha, who lives in the adjoining forest, near



* A Khari is about three bushels

the temple of Shiva, and invite him to the wedding.'

Suspecting that there was some trick involved in this request, Sringabhuja consulted Rupasikha in secret. 'My father,' said Rupasikha in disgust, when she heard what Agnisikha had told Sringabhuja, 'is as wicked as he is stupid. He intends to have you killed, but I shall save you and myself from death; for without you, I do not wish to live... This Dhumasikha, you must know, is a cannibal, and no man who goes to him has ever come back alive; so take these things, and do as I tell you.'

Rupasikha now gave Sringabhuja a parcel of earth, a jar of water, a bundle of thorns and a pot of burning coal. Then leading a stallion, she told her lover: 'Mount this horse and go to Dhumasikha. After delivering the invitation, do not tarry there but return immediately. Ride back as hard as you can, but be careful to keep a good watch at the rear. If you see Dhumasikha following you, you must first drop the parcel of earth; if he follows you again, drop the water, then the thorns and finally the fire. And see what happens.'

As instructed by his beloved, Sringabhuja mounted the stallion and travelling without stopping reached the place where Dhumasikha lived. He was an ugly, weird monster and his very sight repelled the prince. Sringabhuja however delivered the message to Dhumasikha, and immediately turned his back on him and rode as fast as his horse would carry him. Riding far, he looked back and saw the monster following him. As Dhumasikha gained upon him, Sringabhuja dropped

the parcel of earth, and lo! a mighty mountain rose between him and his pursuer!

Leaving the mountain behind, Sringabhuja rode faster than before; but after some time, when he looked back again, he saw that Dhumasikha, who had by now crossed the mountain, was gaining upon him. So he dropped the water jar behind him, which turned the country in his rear into a mighty river.

Riding again, Sringabhuja looked back once again and found that Dhumasikha had forded even the swollen river and was still pursuing him, and so he dropped the bundle of thorns, and in its wake rose a forest of brambles which obstructed Dhumasikha's path. But the monster's perseverance overcame this obstacle too, and when Sringabhuja looked back, after riding away from the bramble wood, he saw Dhumasikha again following him. Upon this he dropped the fire pot behind him, which turned the whole region into a furnace of raging fire. This effectively stopped Dhumasikha and he gave up the pursuit and returned to his forest abode by the temple.

Prince Sringabhuja now presented himself before Agnisikha to report the successful termination of his mission, and Agnisikha was considerably surprised to see the prince, as no man who had been to Dhumasikha had ever come back. He asked Sringabhuja details about the place where Dhumasikha lived, and the replies convinced him that Sringabhuja had actually seen the place. 'This prince,' reflected Agnisikha, 'cannot be a mere man, and I shall get him married to my daughter.'

So, Sringabhuja and Rupasikha were

married, and the couple lived happily together in the palace of Agnisikha in the woods.

Now prince Sringabhuja wished to go back to his own city and see his parents, and he asked Rupasikha if she would care to accompany him. On this she said: 'I do love my forest abode, but to a virtuous woman her husband is everything in life, and so I shall certainly go with you to your native city of Vardhamana and live with you and your people there....But my father will not agree to this; he does not know the duties of a wife, and does not realise that a father loses his right over his daughter on her marriage. So we must leave the palace without any one knowing about it.'

Sringabhuja agreed to abide by her decision, and they planned to leave Dhumapura that very night. The prince also reminded Rupasikha of the golden arrow which had brought him to the palace, and she easily enough got it for him as no one was particularly interested in it and it was lying unnoticed in the armoury.

That night Sringabhuja and Rupasikha eloped with what cash and ornaments they could lay hold of. In the morning their flight was reported to Agnisikha by his minions, and he took his favourite form of a crane and flew in search of his daughter and son-in-law.

When the fugitives were passing through a forest, Rupasikha noticed the crane and immediately recognized in the bird, her father; so hiding her husband in a cave, she transformed herself into a wood-cutter, and started cutting down a tree. When Agnisikha came that way, he asked the wood-

cutter: 'Have you seen, good man, a couple, a handsome young man and a beautiful girl pass this way?'

'Sir,' replied the wood-cutter, not caring to look at him, 'don't you see I am busy? I didn't see any one, young or old, handsome or ugly, come this way, but I have to finish cutting firewood for the cremation of Agnisikha, king of Dhumapura quickly, lest the funeral be delayed.'

'What?' exclaimed Agnisikha, amazed; 'who told you that Agnisikha is dead?'

'You seem to be a stranger in this part of the world,' replied the wood-cutter; 'Agnisikha is dead, and today is his cremation. And I must be ready with the firewood for the pyre before the cortege starts from the palace.... So please leave me alone; I have no time to waste.'

Hearing this Agnisikha began to wonder whether or not he was really alive! Anyway, he wanted to make sure, and returned to his palace to enquire what it was all about. Reaching home, Agnisikha asked his palace guards if he was really alive or dead, and they all laughed at his folly. On this he immediately flew back on his quest.

In the meantime, Sringabhuja and Rupasikha travelled fast, without stopping, towards Vardhamana; but the flying crane gained upon them as they were leaving the forest. Seeing Agnisikha, Rupasikha immediately transformed herself into a courier and hid Sringabhuja in a cave, and when Agnisikha came and saw the courier, he asked him if he had seen, by any chance, a couple come that way. The courier replied: 'I did not see any couple come this way or that, but I am

going in a hurry to Dhumasikha, brother of king Agnisikha, to ask him to come to the palace in the woods and take charge of the affairs of state as Agnisikha is dying. The condition of the king is very serious, and I have not a moment to waste in answering the idle questions of passing cranes.'

On hearing this, Agnisikha wondered if he was really well! He felt a pain in his neck, and went back to his palace to take rest and find out who had sent the messenger to Dhumasikha.

Sringabhuja and Rupasikha had no more trouble from Agnisikha, and they travelled at their leisure and eventually reached Vardhamana.

King Virabhuja was delighted to see his favourite son whom he had taken for lost. Sringabhuja now related to his father in detail all his adventures and how he had come to marry the princess Rupasikha.

The king had enquiries made to find out how the departure of Sringabhuja came about without his knowledge, and detected the evil hand of Ayasolekha in the affair. He now felt convinced that Gunavara was innocent, and the story of her intrigue with Surakshita had been fabricated by the jealous Ayasolekha and her associates. But he decided to have irrefutable proof of her guilt before punishing her, and so sent word to Ayasolekha that she should come to his bedchamber as he wished to spend the night with her. Ayasolekha felt quite elated by this favour; at night, the king cajoled her by guileful conversation into drinking many cups of wine mixed with certain herbs and as a result she fell asleep and started talking in her sleep; she babbled how happy she was to be rid of

Gunavara and how clever in antagonizing the king against her. The king now knew all, and waking her up, threatened to punish her and made her confess everything.

Virabhuja had Gunavara immediately released and he reinstated her into his favour. He wanted to punish the ninety-nine queens for high treason, but Gunavara effectively interceded on their behalf and had them all pardoned. Similarly, the punishment for his ninety-nine sons was waived at the request of Sringabhuja.

And that very day, the faithful and honest Surakshita came back to Vardhamana from his long pilgrimage to Kashmir.

And all lived happily together, the king's ninety-nine wives submitting to Gunavara, and their sons to Sringabhuja.



18

PRINCESS CHAMPAKAGANDHI AND KING VIKRAMA

From Vikramaditya Katha or 'Tales of King Vikramaditya.' Several versions of these tales, of obscure origin and uncertain date, are current in different parts of India. There are thirty-two tales, all narrating the adventures of the legendary king Vikramaditya. It is said that king Vikrama or Vikramaditya propitiated the goddess Kali and obtained from her a boon by which he could reign for one hundred years (or one thousand, according to certain versions). On telling his minister Bhatti about this boon, the minister said he could give the king an additional lease of life for an equal number of years. On being asked how this could be done, the clever minister pointed out to the king that since the boon was for regnal years, he could reign for six months of the year and spend the other six away from his kingdom, leaving it to a deputy, and thus double the span of his life. The king accepted the suggestion and used to spend six months away from his kingdom in self-imposed exile, and the tales of adventure pertain to the periods of his wanderings. The identity of Vikramaditya of the tales has not been established. The era that goes by his name started in 56 B.C. but Indian history knows no such king who ruled at the time. On the other hand, Vikramaditya (Brave Sun) was the title of Chandra Gupta II, of the Gupta dynasty, who ruled Ujjain in the fourth-fifth century of the Christian era, and the tales probably refer to this king. According to the introduction to the Vikramaditya Katha an archaeological discovery set the tales going. On the outskirts of the city of Ujjain, we are told, was a mound and cowboys, while grazing cattle there, used to frequent the place; when there was any dispute among the boys, one of them would ascend the mound when, seized by some mysterious power, he would give judgements wiser than that of the wisest judge in the kingdom. The fame of the mound spread to near by villages, and villagers started going to it to settle their disputes; finally reports of the miraculous mound reached king Bhoja of Ujjain. The king had the mound dug up when a tremendous throne of thirty-two pedestals, with the statuette of a girl on each, was discovered. After having it cleaned and

polished, the king decided to use the throne and had it removed to his court. On an auspicious day, after due ceremonies, king Bhoja ascended the throne, but when he stepped on the first pedestal the statuette of the girl on it became animated and stopped the king. The girl, who gave her name as Kanakangi, declared that the throne belonged to the famous king Vikramaditya and asked Bhoja if he considered himself worthy to occupy it. On this Bhoja wished to know something about Vikramaditya and she narrated an adventure of the king. By the time she had finished the tale it was too late for Bhoja to ascend the throne that day, and he decided to occupy it the next day; the next day, however, he was stopped by the statuette on the second pedestal and regaled with another tale. The same thing happened again and again, and so we have thirty-two tales, one for each day. On the thirty-third day, however, Bhoja sat on the throne of Vikramaditya.The story given here was told by the statuette Priyamvada who guarded the fourth pedestal.

KING VIKRAMA, after ruling for the first half of the year, appointed a deputy and left his kingdom with his faithful minister Bhatti on his travels. After visiting many cities, towns and villages, the two came to a beautiful forest in which was a pavilion of superb workmanship overlooking a lotus lake. The weary travellers took a refreshing bath in the cool waters of the lake and rested in the pavilion, when a zephyr began to blow and the air was filled with the sweet smell of Champaka flowers. They could see no Champaka trees however, and king Vikrama told his minister to find out if there were any trees near about as the king was very fond of Champaka flowers; the minister travelled all through the forest but could not find a single Champaka tree, and told the king so. As the two were wondering what the source of the aroma could be, some wayfarers came their way, and the king asked them how the air was filled with the scent of Champaka flowers when no such flowers could be found anywhere in the forest.

'You seem to be strangers in this

place?' said the wayfarers.

'Yes, we are,' replied the king; 'we are travellers from the distant city of Ujjain and are seeing this place for the first time.'

'Then listen,' said the wayfarers, 'three leagues from here is the famed city of Vijayapuri, ruled by king Vijaya. He has a beautiful and very gifted daughter called Champakagandhi and from her body exudes the sweet perfume of Champaka flowers which fills the air for leagues around. Every Friday she comes here for her bath attended by one thousand maidens — Ah! today happens to be Friday, and you will be well advised to get out of the forest, and that quickly. We are leaving.'

'But why this haste?' asked the king.

'At the age of twelve,' said the wayfarers, 'the princess took a vow that she would not suffer herself to be seen by a man, and wherever she goes, criers go ahead warning all men to keep out. Death is the penalty for those who break the rule.'

'So the princess is not married?' asked the king.

'Married?' laughed the wayfarers;

'she hates the sight of men; if you love your life, you will be wise to leave the place at once. We are off.' Saying this the wayfarers hurried away from the place.

Presently criers arrived warning all men to keep out of the site; but Vikrama and Bhatti, determined to see the strange princess, hid themselves in a thick bush overlooking the pavilion and waited for the arrival of the princess.

Soon the princess came, borne on a golden palanquin by strong women, accompanied by a thousand maidens, and the entire forest was filled with the sweet scent of Champaka flowers. As she descended from the palanquin, king Vikrama saw her lithe lissom form and was at once struck by the arrows of Kama.* As she playfully changed her garments and sat in the pavilion, the king saw her in all her splendrous charm, and it was with difficulty that Bhatti could restrain him from running to her. Anyway, Vikrama was determined not to return to Ujjain without marrying Champakagandhi, and told Bhatti so.

'In that case,' said Bhatti, 'I must first find out why the princess is so hard on men, and then work out a plan by which you can marry her. I do not think it is any use your going to Vijayapuri to marry the princess who hates the very sight of men.'

King Vikrama could very well appreciate the force of this argument, and Bhatti assured the king that he would find out all about the princess by donning the clothes of a woman and slipping into the company of the maidens unnoticed. Accordingly, he hastily cut his own clothes like a woman's,

and putting them on, took leave of the king, but asked him to wait in the same place till his return.

Bhatti stealthily joined the crowd of maidens who had come with the princess and listened to their conversation. They talked of many things but little about the princess. After her bath, the princess dressed and got into her palanquin, and Bhatti went on foot with the women. As the train entered the city of Vijayapuri, protected by seven walls, the girls in groups occupied the quarters allotted to them; and at the palace gate only ten of the close associates of the princess were left with her. Bhatti felt it would be dangerous for him to go into the palace and so turned away from the party, dressed himself as a man again, and left the city. But he had collected no useful information and was reluctant to return to the king. So he took a circuitous route through the forest, and tired by now, lay down under a tree thinking of some plan to get more information about the princess.

At that time a sage who was living in the forest came that way for bathing in a pool near by and saw Bhatti. Finding that the man was uncommonly handsome and fearing that his young wife, who was expected shortly that way for her bath, might fall in love with him, the sage took out a herb from his garment and threw it on Bhatti who, he thought, was sleeping. Bhatti was immediately turned into a woman. The minister saw this but pretended to be asleep and as soon as the sage left, took the herb and hid it in his garments. He then lay down again to think what was to be done next. Presently, the sage's wife came

* The Hindu god of love.

that way. Finding a beautiful woman sleeping under the tree and fearing that her husband, on his way back from the pool, might see and fall in love with her, the lady produced a herb and threw it on Bhatti, when lo! the sleeping beauty was transformed into a man!

As soon as the sage's wife had left the site, Bhatti got up, picked up the herb and hastened to the place where his master was waiting for him. He now confided to Vikrama that though he had not collected any information about the princess' hatred of men, he was in possession of two herbs which could change the sexes of persons at will, and with these they would be able to gain their ends. So they hatched a plan for the execution of which Vikrama was turned into a woman.

Bhatti and the 'lady' now went to Vijayapuri and obtained an interview with the king. Bhatti declared that he was Salya, king of Kuntala, who had come to Vijayapuri with his wife on an urgent and secret mission. On Vijaya wishing to know the object of the distinguished guest's visit, Bhatti said: 'As you probably know, my kingdom had been visited by a dreadful drought; the crops had failed, the treasury became empty and the tribute I had to pay emperor Vikramaditya fell into arrears. And you know very well how harsh the emperor is in levying his dues. When I represented to him my difficulties and asked for the waiving of arrears, he sent a peremptory order to pay up and, far from sympathising with me, has threatened to invade my kingdom. As you know, I have married his sister Vikrami, but when it comes to business Vikramaditya has no friends or relatives. So I have come here with

my wife, without any one knowing it, to find out if you would be able to help me. I am in urgent need of a thousand gold pieces, and if you would be good enough to lend me the amount, I shall repay you as soon as the standing harvest is collected and taxes are received from the people. In the meantime my wife Vikrami will stay with your queens and daughter as pledge.'

Vijaya was prepared to lend the money to his guest in distress but was apprehensive of Vikramaditya's ire for taking his sister as security for the loan. But Salya allayed his fears by stating that the emperor was more fond of his tribute than his sister. So collecting the loan and leaving Vikrami in Vijaya's seraglio, Bhatti took leave of the king. Needless to say, he did not go far; he took up his abode in the forest and bided his time.

Vikrami won the admiration and confidence of princess Champakagandhi by her courtly manners and pleasant conversation and the two became inseparable companions. They ate together, played together and slept in the same room. In fact, the princess became so much attached to Vikrami that she could not bear to be away from her even for an hour.

And then, one morning Vikrami refused to get up from her bed. The princess with the greatest difficulty coaxed her out of bed, but the distracted Vikrami would not eat anything, nor even talk. She sat immersed in some distressing thought. Champakagandhi asked her what worried her and told her many stories about the sanctity of friendship, and the need for confiding all one's cares to friends. In the end, pressed hard by Champakagandhi,

Vikrami said: 'Well, if I tell you the cause of my sorrow, will you remedy it?'

'Certainly,' said Champakagandhi, 'if it is within my power.'

'It is within your power,' replied Vikrami; 'as a matter of fact, I worry not for me but for you. You are a princess in the full bloom of youth, vigour and beauty, and it is a tragedy that you remain unmarried. A young lady without a husband is like a night without the moon, like a kingdom without a king, like a creeper without support, like a green field without a fencing, and like a beautiful tank into which there are no leading steps.

Every day when I see you thus alone, my heart burns for you. I can bear it no longer, and I want to see you united to a prince worthy of your beauty and accomplishments. This is what worries me.'

'Ah!' mused the princess pensively, 'my good friend, you are as dear to me as my soul; though we are two in body, we are one in soul, and I feel it a sin to hide anything from you. I am now going to tell you a guarded secret which I have divulged to no one before; perhaps when you have heard it, you will cheer up and share with me my hatred of the male.'

Vikrami sat up and was all attention.

'In my former birth,' said the princess sighing, 'I was a pigeon, and my name was Shallari. And my husband was the cock bird Shalla. We were living in a forest by the side of a temple of the goddess Kali, and we had our nest on a bamboo tree. We had no young ones for a long time but after propitiating the goddess, I laid two eggs and we had a pair of young ones. Leaving the little nestlings in the nest, we two, my husband and I, used to go in search of food, and daily brought home some food for them. One evening, as we were returning to our nest as usual, we found the forest in flames. Two dry bamboos had produced fire by friction in the wind, which had set the entire forest aflame. All our efforts to reach and save our poor darlings proved futile, and the little ones perished in the conflagration. In sheer despair we two decided to burn ourselves to death; then as I flew towards the raging fire, I noticed my treacherous husband flying away to a safe part of the



forest! There and then I decided that I would have nothing to do with the perfidious sex in any of my future births. Accordingly, I flew into the temple of Kali and prayed hard to the goddess to grant me three boons: next birth as a princess, knowledge of my previous births, and the scent of Champaka flowers in my body. The good goddess granted me these boons, and then I flew straight into the burning forest and killed myself.... That is why, my fair friend, I detest the male.'

'I am happy to hear this,' said Vikrami, 'and since you have sufficient cause to hate the other sex, I think you are right in rejecting matrimony.'

Now that Vikrami was in possession of the princess' secret, she was anxious to leave the palace. Bhatti, who had been visiting Vikrami regularly in the guise of a woman to find out the progress of their plans, was told of the princess' secret. Soon he presented himself before king Vijaya with the money he had borrowed from him, and after many protestations of gratitude asked for permission to take his wife home. Champakagandhi was, no doubt, sorry to part with her friend, but after promising that she would soon visit her, Vikrami took leave of her and left with Bhatti.

Vikramaditya discarded his feminine form, and with Bhatti thought out a plan whereby they could obtain the princess, and stayed in the forest biding their time. Soon an opportunity presented itself for them to put their plans into execution. They heard that a famous travelling troupe of jugglers had arrived and camped in the forest on their way to Vijayapuri to give a

grand performance before the king. Vikramaditya assumed the garb of a wizard proficient in secret arts and Bhatti, who was an adept in jugglery, that of his lady disciple. Bhatti went to the camp of the troupe and by performing certain acts of jugglery to the satisfaction of the management, was allowed to join the players and proceed to Vijayapuri.

The spacious palace grounds of Vijayapuri were converted by the performers into a splendid stage and at the appointed hour the king and the ladies of the court arrived and occupied the royal pavilion. Champakagandhi too was there, sitting behind a curtain so that no man could see her. The troupe performed wonderful feats of jugglery. After their regular performance was over, the stage manager announced that they had a clever woman performer proficient in creating illusions, and introduced the lady.

The girl, by her powerful magic, produced a young man who, she said, was her husband. She then threw a rope upward and ordered her husband to climb up the rope. The 'magic' man climbed as ordered, and disappeared.

'My husband,' declared the girl, 'is an ambitious man. He has gone up into heaven to fight the gods and win for us the kingdom of Indra, king of the gods.'

Soon the sound of war drums, clang of weapons, trumpeting of fighting elephants, the neighing of horses and the war cry of soldiers, were heard. The severed heads of soldiers, horses and elephants rained down from the sky, mutilated and bleeding. And then the bodies started falling. The spectators fell into a panic, some got up

and started running, and even the redoubtable king was shaken.

'Wait,' said the enchantress, 'the war will soon be over. Brave as my husband is, the gods are many, and he cannot fight them all single handed for long; I can see him fighting desperately; but he is tired—Ah there the powerful Indra, king of the gods, has struck him down with his sword!'

And at that moment the gory head of her husband fell to the ground. The girl wept for her dead husband, and the spectators with her.

'There is now no point in my living, as my brave husband is gone,' cried the girl in apparent agony; 'for a faithful woman there is but one thing left when her husband is dead — self-immolation!' Creating a fire-pit from which shot out flames, the girl jumped into it, as the spectators started wailing loudly. And then the fire, the dead bodies, the rope, all vanished and the girl stood laughing at the wailing crowd!

All the persons present were greatly impressed by the girl's performance, the king more than any one else. He called her to the royal pavilion, and asked her who she was and where she had learned her art.

'Your Majesty,' said the girl, 'my name is Bhartri, and I learnt the art of jugglery from my master Virabhadra who has attained the eight Siddhis. What he is capable of performing, I am unable even to describe; he has taught me but a thousandth part of what he knows.'

On this the king, queen and Champakagandhi wanted Virabhadra to give a performance before the court.

'But my master,' said the girl, 'will

not perform before women. In fact, he has taken a vow not to look at a woman.'

'This, indeed, is strange!' said the king; 'but then how did he teach you?'

The girl now told her tale well. 'My father and Virabhadra have been friends from boyhood. Both were born in the juggler caste. After Virabhadra became a master of the art, my father took me to him and he taught me the secret arts by sitting behind a curtain!'

'So he does not mind the presence of women though he does not wish to see them. Let him give the performance here and I shall see to it that all women, even my ladies, sit behind curtains,' said the king.

'In that case,' said the girl, 'I shall persuade my master to give a performance before Your Majesty.'

That very night Bhatti returned to Vikrama and reported to him all that had happened. This, indeed, was exactly what they wanted.

Next day Vikrama came to the court with the troupe, and after all the ladies were seated behind curtains, Champakagandhi among them, the great wizard approached the king and made obeisance. He looked around and seeing that the curtains were rather thin, begged the king to have them replaced by thicker ones. On this the king asked him what had made him take such a rigorous vow against women.

'Before I start my performance,' said the wizard, 'I might as well tell Your Majesty what made me a hater of women. Perhaps it will help you to understand how perfidious women are, and place less trust in them.... In my

previous birth I was a pigeon. My name was Shalla. I had a beloved wife, a hen pigeon by name Shallari, with whom I built a nest on a bamboo tree in a wood near a Kali temple. We lived together happily, and I loved my wife with all my soul, mind and body. We had no children, but I did not leave her on that account. The two of us together propitiated goddess Kali, and by her favour we had two sweet young ones. Daily we went out into the forest, and after feeding ourselves returned to our nest with food for the nestlings. One day, as ill luck would have it, a wild fire caught the bamboo forest, and as we returned home as usual we saw the blazing flames consuming our nest. All our efforts to save our little ones proved futile and they were burnt to death in the conflagration. Unable to bear the loss, we, Shallari and myself, decided to burn ourselves to death. And as I was throwing myself headlong into the raging fire, I saw my treacherous wife flying away to a safe place, and'

'Perfidious liar!' shouted Champakagandhi who was listening attentively to the story; 'it was the scoundrel Shalla who flew away leaving Shallari to the flames.' And tearing the curtain apart she came out and rushed at the wizard.

The astonished crowd of spectators stood up gaping.

'I believe you are princess Champakagandhi, the only daughter of the king. And it ill behoves you, princess,' said the wizard calmly, 'to treat an invited guest in this manner. Anyway, I know what I am talking about; for I myself was the pigeon Shalla.'

'And I was Shallari,' cried the princess, 'and you are the villain who abandoned me.'

'How clever women are,' said the wizard, 'to feel offended even after the most atrocious act of betrayal!'

The two, the wizard and the princess, started abusing each other in the most outrageous language, and the king and the courtiers interfered. The consensus of opinion was that there was some serious misunderstanding between the two birds at the time of their death, and each had mistaken the other for a deserter when in reality both had committed themselves to the flames. And king Vijaya declared that since the wizard and the princess were husband and wife in their former lives, it was but proper that they should be so in the present life too.

And at that moment, Bhatti who had in the confusion changed himself into his male form, appeared on the scene and addressing the wizard as emperor Vikramaditya, declared that there was



but one week for them to reach Ujjain as the six months' exile would then be over.

On learning that the wizard who stood before him was none other than

emperor Vikramaditya in disguise, Vijaya's joy knew no bounds and Champakagandhi was married to Vikramaditya the very same day.

And with a fitting retinue Vikramaditya and his bride set out for Ujjain.

19

VASANTSENA AND CHARUDATTA

From Sudraka's Mricchakatika or 'The Toy Cart.' Little is known about Sudraka except that he wrote this play. Literary evidence would indicate that he was a king of low — Sudra origin with Buddhist leanings, but in Indian history we find no such king. The date of the play is put down at anything between the first and fifth century of the Christian era, and its peculiarity is that it deals mainly with the underworld of Ujjain with its thieves, gamblers, gay women and political revolutionaries, and is completely free from the miraculous element dear to ancient Indian writers. Further, in this drama we have a pleasing picture of a courtesan very different from Kshemendra's Arghagharghatika whose adventures are described in story No. 23; the Mricchakatika probably represents an earlier tradition which held the hetaera in high esteem.

IN THE REIGN of the wicked king Palaka, there lived in the city of Ujjain a Brahmin merchant named Charudatta. He was a man of great wealth, but his generosity was greater. The needy who came to him for aid never went away empty handed, and there was not a good cause in the city that did not find his liberal patronage. But the philanthropic, as the saying is, do not remain rich for long; his munificence and certain adverse turns of fortune involved the good Charudatta heavily in debts and in course of time he found himself in straitened circumstances.

With the loss of wealth, his friends

left Charudatta, but not Vasantasena. This courtesan of Ujjain, as famed for her munificence as for beauty and wealth, was a staunch, ever-helpful ally and an intimate friend and companion of Charudatta, and her love, admiration and regard for him only increased with his misfortunes. In his difficulties she was as friendly and courteous towards him as when he was the richest man in Ujjain, and she was ever anxious to raise him to his past glory and greatness.

Vasantasena was the jewel of the city of Ujjain, and there was not a citizen, however wealthy or powerful, who did not wish to befriend her. And among the accomplished courtesan's

many admirers was Samsthanaka, a vain and stupid nobleman whose sister had married Palaka, the reigning monarch. Setting store by this relationship to the king, Samsthanaka bullied every one in Ujjain. He fancied himself the most handsome man of the age, a great poet and musician besides, and the bravest man in the world. Vasantasena thoroughly detested the bragging dandy; every time he met her, he made overtures to her and every time she rejected his advances.

The offended braggart then decided to abduct or force her. With this evil intent he often prowled about Vasantasena's house and followed her when she went out; he paid court to her shamelessly on the king's highway and even molested her, and none could do anything about it because of his standing with the king and queen.

One evening, when Vasantasena went out alone, Samsthanaka waylaid and stopped her in a deserted street, addressing her in passionate language of infatuated stupidity. His Vita* and a servant were with him. Vasantasena was alarmed as Samsthanaka was as wicked as he was stupid. But she was determined not to give in and said so; on this the Vita interceded on behalf of his master :

'Why, Vasantasena, you act quite out of character. As is well known, the person of a courtesan is for public sale, and that great leveller, money makes the lovable and the disgusting equally welcome to her. She is like a

wayside creeper, accessible to the high and the low. The sage and the idiot, the Brahmin and the outcaste, bathe in the same stream, the crow and the peacock perch on the same bough, and all castes are ferried over in the same boat; so my dear lady, the harlot, like the stream, the bough and the boat, are sought by all and are accessible to all, and your rejection of my master ill suits your trade.'

Vasantasena appreciated this democratic philosophy of love but said that personally she did not like Samsthanaka as he stank in her nostrils, and she would not have anything to do with him.

Samsthanaka took offence at this and emphatically asserted that he smelt of musk. He was clearly out for violence, and Vasantasena saved herself by flight to Charudatta's house which was near by.

Charudatta was in when Vasantasena took refuge in his house, and he assured Vasantasena that her tormentor would not dare pursue her to his home. He sent his servants to look for the miscreant, and when they reported that Samsthanaka and his minions had departed, Vasantasena expressed her desire to go home as she had certain important appointments that night and did not like to miss them. Charudatta sent her under escort, but as a precaution against possible molestation and theft on the road, Vasantasena took off her ornaments, put them in a casket she had with her and gave it to the merchant for safe custody for the night. After this, she thanked Charudatta for his help, and departed for home.

As ill luck would have it, that very

* A man of wealth and leisure in ancient India, had a paid sycophant - clown - companion, called Vita who kept him in good humour.



night Sarvalika, a notorious burglar, broke into Charudatta's house and chancing upon the casket containing Vasantasena's jewellery made off with it.

In the morning, when the theft was discovered, Charudatta did not know what to do. Vasantasena had left word the previous evening that her jewellery was to be sent to her during the day, and if he were to give out that the casket was stolen, neither Vasantasena nor any one who heard the tale, Charudatta feared, was likely to believe it, as all people in Ujjain knew that

he had fallen on evil days and was short of cash; the probable interpretation would be, he thought, that he had misappropriated the courtesan's jewellery and invented a plausible tale of theft. In this predicament, Charudatta took his wife into his confidence, and the good lady decided to save the honour and good name of her husband by surrendering her own jewellery, to be sent across to Vasantasena.* Charudatta felt that this was the best thing he could do under the circumstances; but he did not wish to divulge to the courtesan the theft of the casket which, he thought, was not credible and so while sending the jewellery back, Charudatta asked the messenger to tell Vasantasena that in a desperate attempt to retrieve his fortune he went to a gaming house, offered her ornaments as stake, lost everything, and was hence sending her, in lieu, the jewellery of his wife.

In the meantime, Sarvalika, who had stolen the casket, was so struck by the beauty and workmanship of the jewellery that he thought it a pity to sell so good a treasure and presented it to his sweetheart, Madanika.

This Madanika happened to be a maid-servant of Vasantasena. After the departure of her lover, Madanika took out the jewellery from the casket and on examination found that it belonged to her mistress Vasantasena. Madanika was a faithful servant and she immediately took the ornaments to Vasantasena who accepted them gratefully and gave her valuable presents.

* Concubinage was a recognised institution in ancient India as in many other countries, and very good relations often existed between a man's wife and his mistress.



It was then that Maitreya, Charudatta's messenger, came to Vasantasena with the ornaments of his wife, and the gambling story. The amused Vasantasena heard the tale with apparent concern, accepted the ornaments, thanked Maitreya and sent him back. Maitreya, who was a devoted friend of Charudatta, made some bitter remarks to himself about the rapacity of courtesans; for he had expected that Vasantasena, who knew full well of the financial difficulties of Charudatta, of whose generosity she had been a frequent recipient in his palmy days, would be decent enough to refuse the ornaments of his wife, offered by Charudatta in his distress. 'But it is too much to expect jewels out of a courtesan's hand; one might as well get back the sugarcane that had fallen into an elephant's mouth!' Thus soliloquized Maitreya as he walked back home to Charudatta.

That evening Vasantasena visited Charudatta. She too brought with her, like Maitreya, a casket and a story. The jewellery Charudatta had sent her, she said, was offered for a stake by her in a gaming house that afternoon and lost, and she had come to find out its price, as she felt certain that it was more costly than her own jewellery, and to return the difference. She was just then, she explained, short of cash and had brought a casket of her own jewels in lieu. And Vasantasena gave the casket to Charudatta.

The inquisitive Maitreya who was with Charudatta, on examining the contents of the casket, was surprised to find in it the stolen jewels, and told

Charudatta so. Laughing, Vasantasena explained to them how she had got back her stolen jewels, and chided Charudatta for sending her his wife's precious ornaments; she returned them and gave a strict warning to Charudatta against depriving his devoted wife of her precious jewellery, whatsoever might be his financial difficulties. Charudatta explained to her what made him invent the story of the gambling and send her his wife's ornaments. All had a good laugh at the joke, and the gay evening grew into the young night under the influence of pleasant conversation and stimulating refreshments.

When it was time for Vasantasena to return home, it started to rain heavily, and thunder, lightning and flooded streets made it impossible for her to go back home that night. So Vasantasena was compelled to spend the night in Charudatta's house.

Charudatta felt like spending the next day in the beautiful Pushpakaranda grove on the outskirts of the city. After that night's rain he knew the grove would be wonderful. He asked Vasantasena if she would care to go to the grove, and she was delighted by the proposal. So plans were made at night for the party to go to the grove the next day. The arrangement was that Charudatta and Maitreya should proceed before day break to Pushpakaranda and choose the site of the picnic, and Vasantasena should join them later after breakfast in Charudatta's house. He was to drive in his own carriage to the grove and send back the vehicle with his driver Vardhamana, to bring Vasantasena to the picnic spot.

Everything went according to plan. Charudatta and Maitreya departed before day-break and Vasantasena arose soon after they had left. While sauntering about the house, she happened to see Charudatta's little son Rohasena with his nurse, in the courtyard of the house. The boy was crying for a golden toy cart he had seen at a neighbour's and the nurse was heard telling him that his father was not rich enough to buy him such a costly toy and he should be content with the clay cart he had. On hearing this the boy started shouting and beating his nurse and Vasantasena walked to the spot. On learning from the nurse the cause of Rohasena's distress, Vasantasena filled the boy's clay cart with her jewellery and asked him to go and buy a golden cart better than his neighbour's. On this the nurse told Vasantasena that her master Charudatta would scold her if she allowed the boy to accept the jewellery, but Vasantasena assured her that she would speak to Charudatta about it and no blame would rest with her.*

Charudatta's driver Vardhamana had by now returned with the carriage, after leaving his master and Maitreya in Pushpakaranda, in order to take Vasantasena to the grove; she was not, however, ready and asking the driver to wait, went into the house to have breakfast and to dress. While waiting

at the gate with the carriage Vardhamana remembered that he had forgotten to take the cushions for the lady and thinking it unsafe to leave the carriage unattended at the gate, drove off to the stables to fetch the cushions.

Now it so happened that the scoundrel Samsthanaka had also gone to Pushpakaranda early that morning; his carriage too had been sent back home but his driver, Sthavaraka, had instructions to take the carriage to the grove before noon for Samsthanaka's return. On his way to Pushpakaranda, Sthavaraka had to drive past Charudatta's house but on reaching the gate he found the road ahead blocked by a country cart, a wheel of which had got stuck in the mud—the cartman was bawling out for help. Sthavaraka called the rustic driver names, and abused his parents and grandparents, but that did not clear the road and so he was obliged to leave his carriage at the gate and go ahead to help the cartman.

As Sthavaraka left the carriage and went ahead to help the cartman, Charudatta's maid-servant, who saw the carriage at the gate, mistook it for her master's and informed Vasantasena, who was now ready to leave, that the carriage had come back. Thus the courtesan got into the wrong carriage. Presently, Sthavaraka came back after clearing the road, and drove the carriage away without noticing its occupant.

Soon after the departure of Samsthanaka's carriage, Vardhamana, taking the cushions, brought Charudatta's carriage to the gate. As the cart was waiting, Aryaka, leader of a revolutionary gang that was planning the assassination of the wicked king Palaka and who had been caught and jailed,

* Though association with a well-known courtesan often enhanced the reputation of a fashionable gentleman in ancient India, respectable women were forbidden to associate with courtesans. So even when a courtesan spent the night in a gentleman's house, she had to occupy the men's section of the establishment and not the women's apartment.

crept into the carriage as he had escaped from prison and was looking desperately for some means of flight. The carriage was a closed, heavily curtained vehicle, and the driver, from his position near the yoke, could not see who got in or out; so when Vardhamana felt the weight on the axle, he thought Vasantasena had entered the carriage and promptly drove off.

When Charudatta's carriage arrived at Pushpakaranda, the merchant and his companion Maitreya were not a little surprised to find in it Aryaka and not Vasantasena. Aryaka, who was a well-known rebel, asked Charudatta for protection, and the merchant, who shared the public disapproval of the wicked king and had sympathy for the Aryaka faction, helped him to escape. Charudatta wondered what had happened to Vasantasena; there was some mistake, it was clear to him, but he did not suspect any foul play. He concluded that Vasantasena, after vainly waiting for the carriage after it had driven off with Aryaka, had possibly gone home to her own house. So in the evening, after a wasted day, he returned home with Maitreya.

When Charudatta was waiting for the arrival of Vasantasena, Samsthanaka with his Vita was waiting in another part of Pushpakaranda for the arrival of his carriage. When eventually the vehicle appeared and he went to board it, Samsthanaka was amazed to find Vasantasena in it. At first he thought that this was some phantom created by his feverish brain, which of late had been overworking on plans to capture Vasantasena; but soon the truth, the incredible truth that Vasantasena in person was in his carriage burst upon

him, and in his joy abounding he literally dragged her out of the carriage. Wasting no time, he embarked upon a vigorous piece of courting, which Vasantasena as vigorously resisted. On this he asked his Vita to retire as he thought that modesty was preventing Vasantasena from accepting his suit in the presence of a stranger. But even after the departure of the Vita, Samsthanaka's suit did not prosper well. But he was determined not to let the opportunity go; the place was lonely, no help was available to Vasantasena, and he could work his will upon her. He tried to force her, heaping abuses on Charudatta into the bargain, but the spirited lady defended her friend and called her tormentor names. On this, the exasperated Samsthanaka, in a fit of sadism, fell upon her and strangled Vasantasena. The sight of the motionless body awakened Samsthanaka to a sense of his crime, and he left the body covered with dry leaves under a tree.

When Samsthanaka's Vita returned and saw what had happened, he was horrified. He was prepared to help his master to get Vasantasena, but he was revolted beyond words by the foul murder of a woman by Samsthanaka, and declared that he would have nothing to do with a villain who had perpetrated so heinous a crime. On this Samsthanaka coolly accused his Vita of the murder of Vasantasena and swore that he would speak to his sister and brother-in-law about it and have him hanged. The Vita knew that Samsthanaka was in a position to carry out his threat, and he fled from the grove to join Aryaka's faction in order to bring about the downfall of Palaka in whose

reign, he felt, no honest man was safe.

Sthavaraka, the driver, was now the only remaining eye witness to the crime, and Samsthanaka promised him wealth and honours if he would keep quiet. Sthavaraka agreed, and he drove his master back to his house. As soon as he had reached home safely, Samsthanaka, taking no chances, had Sthavaraka confined in an attic in his mansion, and threatened to kill him if he tried any tricks.

Samsthanaka now decided to get rid of Charudatta, whom he considered his arch enemy because of Vasantasena's love for him, which terribly excited his jealousy. So next morning, when the judges appeared in the court of law in the city, Samsthanaka brought a complaint before them accusing Charudatta of the murder of Vasantasena for the sake of her jewellery; he had discovered the body of the courtesan, by chance, in the Pushpakaranda grove, he said. He had irrefutable proof of Charudatta's guilt, he asserted, and demanded immediate hearing of the case. The judges were inclined to wait pending investigations, but Samsthanaka threatened to bring on them the royal wrath in case so urgent a matter was delayed, and the timid judges, thus intimidated, took up the case as Samsthanaka wanted.

The first witness examined was Vasantasena's mother. She deposed that Vasantasena had gone to Charudatta's house on the eve of the date of the crime, and had not returned. But she emphatically asserted that Charudatta and her daughter were the best of friends and she did not consider him capable of the murder of

her daughter.

Samsthanaka who intimidated the judges, witness and lawyer, swore that the old whore was a liar, and asked her to reserve her opinions to herself. For general information, he gave out that Charudatta was ruined by debts, and of late had been resorting to desperate remedies to satisfy his creditors; he emphatically declared that Charudatta had murdered Vasantasena for the sake of the jewellery she had on her person.

Eventually Charudatta himself was arrested and brought to the court. He was shocked to hear that Vasantasena had been killed, and he nearly collapsed when Samsthanaka's mendacious accusation was read out to him. He made no effort to defend himself; for one thing he loved Vasantasena so dearly that he felt life without her was not worth living, and for another, he was visiting a law court for the first time and could very well see that no honest man could win his cause in a court of law. For,

'The court is like a sea — its
councillors
Are deep engulfed in thought; its brood
of monsters
Are these wild animals — death's
ministers —
Attorneys skim like wily snakes the
surface —
Spies are the shell-fish cowering
'midst its weeds,
And vile informers, like the
hovering curlew,
Hang fluttering o'er, then pounce
upon their prey;
The beach that should be justice, is
unsafe,

Rough, rude and broken by
oppression's storms.*

As Charudatta reeled in the storm of this raging sea, something happened that sealed his doom. Maitreya, who had been entrusted by Charudatta's wife with the task of returning the jewellery Vasantasena had left in Rohasena's toy cart, was taking it to the courtesan's house when he heard about the arrest of Charudatta. He hurried to the court to find out what was wrong, as he suspected that Charudatta's part in the escape of Aryaka had been reported by the ubiquitous spies of Palaka, and his friend had fallen under royal displeasure.

On reaching the court, Maitreya was amazed to hear that Charudatta had been accused by Samsthanaka of the murder of Vasantasena for her jewels. He lost his mental balance and discarding all legal decorum thus addressed the court without leave: 'Gentlemen, what is this madness? Do you honestly believe that Charudatta, who has beautified our city with its chief ornaments, who has filled Ujjain with gardens, arches, parks, wells and fountains, with convents, monasteries and temples — do you believe that this Charudatta is capable of committing the most detestable of crimes, the murder of a woman, and that too of the fairest flower of Ujjain whom he adored and valued more than his own life, for some beggarly ornaments? Gentlemen, in the pursuit of your profession, have you lost all common sense?' And then turning to Samsthanaka, he added: 'And you, you abominable boor — you, king's

brother-in-law — I mean you, Samsthanaka, you, the wildest scoundrel that ever lived under the canopy of heaven — I mean you, beast, you, monkey — tricked out with golden toys and fattened on the royal indulgence — say, if you dare, before me, that my friend Charudatta, who never plucked a flower roughly in his life, who never pulled more than one at a time and always left the young buds untouched — say, I challenge you, in my presence that Charudatta has committed this crime detestable in both the worlds, and I will break your thick skull into a thousand pieces with this staff of mine which is as crooked as thine own heart.' And Maitreya shook his crooked staff menacingly at Samsthanaka.

Samsthanaka rose to the occasion. He loudly accused Charudatta of the murder of Vasantasena, for every one, including Maitreya, to hear, and Maitreya, true to his word, struck Samsthanaka with his crooked stick. The blow did not, however, break Samsthanaka's head into a thousand pieces as Maitreya had expected; evading the blow Samsthanaka charged Maitreya, and in the scuffle that ensued, Vasantasena's ornaments which Maitreya was carrying, dropped from his girdle.

Officers of the court now interfered and separated the combatants, and Samsthanaka picked up the ornaments of Vasantasena Maitreya had dropped and showed them as undeniable proof of Charudatta's crime. The ornaments were identified as Vasantasena's and Maitreya's explanations, which showed that the ornaments were in Charudatta's house, only confirmed the court's suspicion. Charudatta, struck

* Tr., H. H. Wilson.

dumb by the inescapable net an evil fate had spread for his destruction, stood silent and dumbfounded.

The court found Charudatta guilty of the murder of Vasantasena. The punishment for murder was as a rule death, but according to the law-giver Manu, Brahmins found guilty of whatever crime could not be executed, and as such the court recommended to the king that Charudatta be exiled. King Palaka, however, was no respecter of Brahmins, and he decreed that Charudatta should be executed like any other felon.

So the good Brahmin, bound hand and foot, was taken through the streets of Ujjain, the executioners announcing his crime at every cross-road with beat of drum as a warning to possible criminals. While the procession was thus passing Samsthanaka's house, Sthavaraka, who happened to see Charudatta from the attic in which he was confined, broke the window bars of the attic, jumped into the street and declared that Samsthanaka and not Charudatta had murdered Vasantasena. But Samsthanaka who was closely following Charudatta to see to the successful termination of the execution, convinced the crowd and the minions of the law that Sthavaraka's accusation was false and spiteful, as he had confined him in his attic for misbehaviour and he, Sthavaraka, wished to avenge by false charges this restraint legitimately imposed on him by his master. So Samsthanaka had Sthavaraka seized and taken back to his house.

At the execution block there was, however, much more serious trouble which prevented Charudatta's execution. It was the arrival of Vasantasena herself, with a Buddhist monk, at the site!

Vasantasena was not actually dead. The strangling had only left her unconscious, and a Buddhist monk who happened to pass that way after the departure of Samsthanaka, found Vasantasena groaning and had her removed to a convent near by. Here the nuns attended to her; she regained full consciousness, and by next day was almost normal. Vasantasena now came to hear about Charudatta's sentence, and hurried with the monk to the city, and arrived at the site of execution just in time to save him.

As the crowd was rejoicing at the appearance of Vasantasena and seeking Samsthanaka, news spread through the city like wild fire that king Palaka had been assassinated by Aryaka's party, which had taken over the government of Ujjain. A mob seized Samsthanaka and people started debating among themselves as to what was the most tortuous method for killing so murderous a villain as Samsthanaka; they brought him before Charudatta, and the wretch in agony appealed to Charudatta and Vasantasena for mercy. Charudatta, ever generous, pacified the mob and had Samsthanaka released.

Charudatta's devoted wife, in the meantime, hearing of the conviction of her husband and his impending execution had made all arrangements

for committing herself to the funeral pyre. The pyre was lit, and she was about to jump into it when Charudatta and Vasantasena reached the site with a cheering crowd.

And Vasantasena and Charudatta's wife embraced each other as two devoted co-wives would, while little Rohasena, who was brought to the scene, leapt for joy.

20

THE STORY OF DEVAYANI

The tale of Devayani found in the Mahabharata (see story No. 2) is peculiar in many ways. Devayani's father, the Brahmin sage Sukra, also called Ushanas, was the preceptor of the Asuras, the enemies of Indo-Aryans and their gods. Brahmins, according to ancient Hindu law-givers, were not allowed to teach or serve non-Aryans, not at any rate their professed enemies; but Sukra appears as the staunch ally and traditional teacher of the Asuras. More intriguing is Devayani herself. A Brahmin lady, neither in legend nor in practice, is allowed to take the initiative regards her marriage; but Devayani, as will be seen from the story, proposes to Kacha. Above all, Devayani's marriage is the only recognised instance of a Pratiloma match (marriage of a high caste Hindu lady with a man below her caste status) in the whole religious literature of the Hindus. As a rule, a Hindu lady is prohibited to marry a man below her in caste, though men are allowed to take wives from lower castes.

SUKRA, THE BRAHMIN preceptor of the Asuras, was proficient in all the arts and sciences, and knew a secret spell which could bring the dead back to life. Any Asura who fell in action was immediately revived by Sukra's magic and sent back to fight, and so the Asuras were ever victorious in their wars with the gods who did not know the art of resurrecting the dead.

The gods now took counsel among themselves and decided to send Kacha, the brilliant son of their preceptor Brahaspathi, to Sukra to learn from him the incantation that could resurrect the dead. Kacha went to Sukra, told him who he was and

begged to be accepted as a disciple of the sage. The young man's frankness and his thirst for knowledge impressed Sukra who took him as his disciple. So Kacha lived, as was the custom of the age, in the house of his Guru, studying at his feet, attending to his needs and tending his cattle.

Now Sukra had an only daughter called Devayani who kept house for him. Kacha helped her in her domestic duties, brought flowers for her when he went out into the woods and regaled her with many a tale of the gods among whom he had lived. Kacha's friendly ways, pleasant conversation, meticulous attention to his studies and his eagerness to help her, all attracted

Devayani, and when the young man went out into the grazing grounds with the bulls and cows of the household, she missed him much.

Kacha, on his part, did everything in his power to please his Guru and his daughter, and learned diligently all the arts and sciences Sukra taught him; but the sage, for obvious reasons, did not teach him the spell that brought the dead back to life.

Now the Asuras came to know who the disciple of their preceptor was, and what he was after. They thought it was no use their trying to persuade Sukra to send Kacha away, as the bond between a teacher and his pupil was sacred and inviolable, and no conscientious teacher would send away an obedient and devoted pupil before his period of instruction was over. So they decided to kill Kacha.

One day when Kacha was out in the grazing lands tending his master's cattle, the Asuras fell upon him, cut his body into pieces and threw these to the wolves and jackals of the jungle.

At sundown, the cows and bulls returned to their pen, but Devayani, who was anxiously waiting for Kacha, saw that he was not with them. Distressed she said to her father: 'I have lit the evening fire, the sun has gone down, darkness has spread over the land and the cows have returned to the pen, but Kacha has not come home. I fear, O father, something dreadful has happened to the young man.'

Sukra now meditated and by the power of his meditation came to know what had happened to Kacha, and told Devayani that he had been killed by the Asuras. 'My dear father,' sob-

bed Devayani, 'I cannot live without Kacha. Pray, bring him back to life.'

Sukra, acceding to his daughter's request, recited the spell of life, and Kacha, tearing asunder the bowels of the wolves and jackals that had consumed him, came back to life and returned to Devayani.

Next day as usual, Kacha went out and as he was picking flowers for Devayani, the Asuras seized him, ground his body into powder and threw it into the seven seas.

At nightfall, the cattle again returned to the pen without Kacha. Devayani became apprehensive, reported the matter to Sukra and the sage again revived Kacha.

The Asuras, finding themselves foiled in both their attempts to kill Kacha, decided on a plan by which Kacha would be destroyed beyond Sukra's power of recall. So they waylaid the young man as he was proceeding to the grazing lands and burnt his body to ashes; then they cleverly dissolved the ashes in wine and inviting Sukra for the noon meal, gave the sage the wine to drink which the unsuspecting sage did.

When Kacha did not return in the evening, Devayani again went to Sukra and told him that Kacha had not come back. The sage meditated and discovered that Kacha was in his own stomach! In distress he told Devayani: 'Darling daughter, this time the Asuras have succeeded in destroying Kacha beyond recall. He is in my own stomach. They killed and burnt him and gave me his ashes, dissolved in wine, to drink. So you can choose between your father and your friend.'

But Devayani wanted both her

father and friend. She started wailing aloud calling out the name of Kacha.

Now Kacha spoke gently from Sukra's stomach: 'Revered Sir, you can grant Devayani's wish by teaching me the mystic spell. Once I come out of your stomach, I can revive you by repeating it.'

Sukra knew that this was the only way out of the situation and he taught Kacha the potent spell. And then Kacha came out of Sukra's body and he recited the spell and revived his dead Guru.

The course of Kacha's instruction was now over. He had learnt all that Sukra knew and wished to return to his people. So he took his Guru's permission to leave, and went to take farewell of Devayani. But the girl would not let him depart. She loved him as her own life, she said, and could not live without him. 'It is only proper that we should now get married according to the prescribed rites,' she said.

Kacha was quite surprised at this proposal. He had loved her as he would have loved a sister, and that too because she was his preceptor's daughter. 'You are like a sister to me,' said Kacha, 'and I cannot marry you!'

But Devayani loved Kacha to distraction, and would not be pacified by anything he said. 'You owe everything to me, your life itself,' she pointed out; 'when thrice the Asuras killed you, I had you revived, and this is the way you repay the debt!'

But Kacha refused to be persuaded. He had a duty to his father and his people, and he was determined to leave Devayani. When all her entreaties proved futile, the thought of Kacha

doing harm to her people by the power of the spell oppressed Devayani. It was imperative that he should be made harmless. So she cursed: 'Let the knowledge of the spell of life be ineffective when used by you.'

This, however, did not make Kacha stay back. 'Even if the spell be ineffective when used by me, others are immune to your curse; I can teach the deserving among my people how to use the spell and gain the end for which I came to Sukra.' So saying Kacha left Devayani and went back to the gods.

Time healed the wound, and Devayani grew into the full bloom of youth. Ever fond of gaiety, she went one day for a picnic in a forest with Sharmishta, the beautiful daughter of Vrishaparvan, the Asura king. While the two young girls were playing, they started in jest an argument about each other's looks and accomplishments, and what with one thing leading to another, Sharmishta called Devayani a slave girl. Devayani very naturally resented this, when Sharmishta said: 'Your father is an impecunious Brahmin who lives on my father's bounty. He is, in effect, my father's slave and you, being the daughter of my father's slave, are my slave.'

On this the offended Devayani said many uncharitable things about the Asuras in general and Sharmishta in particular, which the princess loudly refuted. These indecisive arguments led to blows, and Sharmishta caught and pushed Devayani into a dry well, and went back to her palace alone as if nothing had happened.

Devayani cried for help from the well and as luck would have it, king Yayati,



who had strayed away from a hunting expedition he was leading, came that way. The king, hearing the voice of the damsel, hastened to the well and helped Devayani out, as the well was not very deep and the girl could take hold of his extended hand. The solicitous king asked Devayani who she was and how she happened to fall into the well, and Devayani told him all that had taken place. Devayani duly expressed her gratitude to Yayati, and

declining his offer to escort her, went home alone.

On reaching her house Devayani narrated to her father all that had happened between Sharmishta and herself, and asked him if he was really the slave of Vrishaparvan.

'Far from my being his slave,' replied Sukra, considerably agitated by Devayani's dismal tale, 'he is my slave. Without me, Vrishaparvan is helpless, and would be at the mercy of his ene-

mies. In fact, it is my knowledge of the Incantation that can revive the dead that is the secret of his success in arms and consequent greatness.'

'In that case,' pleaded Devayani, weeping, 'you must, O father, give me Sharmishta as my maid-servant. You know she called me a slave and well nigh killed me. I must avenge the insult and the injury.'

Sukra, who doted on his daughter, agreed to do this for Devayani. So he went to Vrishaparvan and narrated to him how Sharmishta had insulted and thrown Devayani into a well. On hearing this, Vrishaparvan called his daughter and questioned her, and the charges against Sharmishta were proved. Vrishaparvan was anxious to make amends and asked Sukra what penance he could do for so grievous a hurt caused to his preceptor by his unthinking daughter. On this Sukra demanded that Sharmishta should serve Devayani as her maid. Vrishaparvan was grieved to hear this, but as Sukra persisted, he complied with his preceptor's request, and there and then made over Sharmishta to Sukra to be taken to Devayani.

Having thus obtained Sharmishta as a maid, Devayani was quite pleased with herself. She thought that the crowning of her victory would be in going on a picnic, with Sharmishta serving her, to the same spot where she had been thrown into the well!

So one fine morning, Devayani proceeded to the forest with Sharmishta attending on her, and as the two young ladies reached the memorable well, king Yayati happened to pass that way. Devayani, very naturally, fell into conversation with her deliverer, and each

found the other's company stimulating. It was Spring: the trees were in bloom, birds were singing in the branches and the whole forest was filled with the aroma of flowers and the music of humming bees.

Devayani was greatly impressed by the chivalry, courteous behaviour and noble bearing of the king, and the romantic atmosphere of the place getting the better of her modesty, she expressed a desire to get married to king Yayati. At first the king was reluctant to accept the proposal, for Devayani was a Brahmin lady and Yayati, a Kshatriya, lower in the caste scale. But Devayani pointed out that Yayati had on the last occasion taken her by the hand, out of the well, and the very act of his holding her hand had, in effect, constituted the marriage rite,* and as such they were already married, whether the law permitted it or not, and all that remained to be done was a formal confirmation ceremony. This brought conviction to Yayati; he accepted Devayani's proposal and promised to start regular negotiations with Sukra who, he pointed out, was the best authority on the law of marriage. Seeing the vivacious and beautiful Sharmishta in attendance on her, Yayati asked Devayani who she was, and Devayani dismissed the query by the curt remark that she was an Asura maid-servant of hers.

Yayati, as he had promised, sent a regular marriage proposal to Sukra. The sage, who was well-versed in sacred lore and was never at a loss

* In certain Hindu wedding ceremonies, Panigrahana or taking the hand seals the union. Because of this, the Panigrahana (holding hands) has become in Sanskrit synonym for marriage.

for scriptural authority for anything his daughter wanted, declared that the law of distress permitted of such marriages, and Yayati, who held Devayani's hand while helping her out of the well, had actually married her. So he accepted the marriage proposal sent by Yayati and had his daughter married to the king according to the prescribed rites.

After marriage, Yayati took Devayani to his kingdom. And with the bride went, as was but natural, her maid-servant Sharmishta.

Reaching Yayati's palace, Sharmishta told the king and Devayani that she would like to have a separate residence, as she was born and brought up as a princess and was entitled to a certain amount of privacy and consideration. The king thought this request reasonable. Devayani raised no objection to this; on the contrary she felt considerably relieved by the suggestion, as she was finding Sharmishta's presence in her establishment a nuisance during the honeymoon since Yayati and Devayani were most of the time together.

So king Yayati had a spacious mansion built for his wife's lady-in-waiting and Sharmishta, though in theory a dependent, lived like an independent person in a separate establishment. This also made it possible for her to excuse herself from attendance on Devayani on many occasions on some pretext or other.

One full moon night in Spring, the season when the mischievous Archer of Love starts his depredations, king Yayati unaccountably wandered into the residence of his wife's lady-in-waiting. Sharmishta was delighted by this visit and asked the king solicitous-

ly why she was so honoured. Yayati told her that he had come to find out if she was quite comfortable in her new house. The grateful lady told the king that she had, by his favour, all that she wanted. After these preliminaries, more interesting subjects were discussed, and the king discovered that Sharmishta was as learned as she was beautiful. Her intellectual brilliance in fact enthralled him. He listened attentively to her discourse, and was considerably interested when she confided to him that just at the moment there was an auspicious conjunction of stars that promised the birth of a great man, provided union took place at her residence during that watch of the night, and that she was in her Rtu.* She also pointed out to him that it was a sin to waste a woman's Rtu when a man was available to fertilise it and both the man and the woman, according to sacred writ, would go to hell. Herein was a situation, she maintained, which challenged their sense of duty to each other and to posterity, especially as the hour indicated the birth of a great man who would bring untold blessing to the world; she even expressed a feeling that the gods had purposely sent

* Ancient Hindu sexologists considered the six days following the cessation of the menstrual flow as the Rtu fertile period in a woman. Co-habitation during a woman's Rtu was a religious obligation of both husband and wife, according to most Hindu law-givers who wrote at a time when Aryan expansion in India made population rise an imperative need for the community. Hence much was excused a woman who in the absence of her husband in her Rtu had recourse to friends, relatives and even strangers for the sake of progeny. Child marriage, some authorities say, was occasioned by the need for fructifying the first Rtu of a girl, and a girl who remained unmarried after maturity had, in the opinion of many law-givers, the right to take the law into her own hands.



Yayati to her at that moment to fructify her.

The king was inclined to believe this; for, he admitted, there was no ostensible reason for his loitering into her residence that night; personally he was willing to do his duty to themselves and to posterity, but he had certain royal scruples in the matter. For one thing, he said, the sentiments of his wife had to be taken into consideration, and for another, if Sharmishta, after co-habitation, became pregnant, as she was bound to be in view of what the stars foretold, it would not be possible to keep the matter a secret; besides, old Sukra, Yayati confided to Sharmishta, was always suspicious of Sharmishta's loyalty to Devayani, and had extracted from him a promise at the time of his marriage that he would not indulge in any dalliance with Sharmishta.

This last piece of information was a revelation to Sharmishta and she resented it more than anything else. The young lady now delivered a spirited discourse on morals. 'Morality,' she explained, 'is difficult to understand and even sages have erred, and done what is evil while imagining they were doing good.... When a particular situation involves two apparent evils, the lesser evil is always preferred by the wise and the discriminating. Here, in our case, two apparent sins are involved: the sin of letting the Rtu of a virtuous woman go waste with the attendant peril of depriving the world of a great man, and the sin of extra-marital intercourse. Of the two, the former is undoubtedly the major sin. As for me, sages have ordained that a girl should be married when she comes of age, and my father has

failed in his obligations towards his daughter, and so I am a free agent competent to do what I think proper. As for you, every man is duty bound to fructify a woman's Rtu when requested to do so. Even celibates and ascetics have co-habited with women in their Rtu without losing their virtue or religious merit. It is true that Devayani is of a jealous disposition and would create trouble if she comes to know of this affair. But the matter can be kept a secret from her; the law concedes that honest Aryans can tell lies to their jealous wives regarding love affairs. As for your promise to that old dotard Sukra, you are not bound to respect it, since his intentions were evil and directed against my maternal rights and well-being.... Further, I will have no trouble with Devayani; she is a spoiled child and an absolute fool, and I can explain away the birth of my baby, when it happens, by idle tales.'

This devastating discourse on morals completely broke down Yayati's resistance, and he spent the night with Sharmishta.

In due course, a son was born to Sharmishta, and Devayani's suspicions were roused. So she called her maid-servant to her palace, and asked her how this thing had happened without her being married. 'Good mistress,' said Sharmishta with becoming humility, 'when I was given to you as your maid-servant, I lost all hope of ever getting married, and hence mentally served a sage with diligence and got from him a boon by the power of which a son was born to me.'

Devayani was relieved to hear this. Puissant sages were known to be

capable of granting such wonderful boons, there was nothing improbable in the tale, and Devayani believed it. But Sharmishta's desire for sons did not stop with one Rtu or a single conjunction of stars. In fact, Yayati became a regular nocturnal visitor to Sharmishta's mansion, as he found the company of the intelligent and lively Sharmishta much more enjoyable than that of Devayani. This intrigue went on till two more sons were born to Sharmishta.

Devayani now noticed a certain coldness of manner in her maid-servant. Her periodical absence from duty was becoming frequent and prolonged. Besides, Devayani noticed that her husband was becoming rather indifferent towards her and whenever Sharmishta was away, Yayati too was missing from his palace as well as Devayani's establishment.

So one day Devayani, out of curiosity, went to Sharmishta's house and found her husband playing in the pleasance with three bouncing boys. On seeing Devayani, Yayati looked considerably embarrassed, but he welcomed her with as best a grace as he could command. Devayani asked him who the boys he was playing with were, and he told Devayani they were Sharmishta's sons obtained through the Holy Ghost. Devayani was not quite satisfied with this answer, especially as she noticed him playing with the boys as fondly as a father would. So she started talking to the boys and after the departure of Yayati, asked them if they knew who he was. 'Of course,' said the children proudly, 'he is our father, king Yayati!'

On hearing this, Devayani walked

straight into Sharmishta's house and called her a liar, a cheat and a seducer of honest women's husbands. Sharmishta, finding that her relations with Yayati could no more be kept a secret, turned to bay and told her squarely that her children were all of Yayati, and Devayani was free to do what she liked! She even told Devayani that according to ancient law a maid had a right on her mistress' husband and could avail herself of it in times of need.

'In this you betray your Asura nature,' derided Devayani.

'I don't know if it is Asura nature or Sura nature,' replied Sharmishta, seldom at a loss for words; 'but I know a woman's right to motherhood is the law of nature, and neither you nor your silly father has any right to deprive me of my rights.'

Sharmishta was working herself into a temper, almost to the pitch of excitement that led to the famous incident of the well, and Devayani felt there was no point in arguing with a woman like her. So she left Sharmishta, and went to Yayati and accused him of adultery and duplicity. The king gave evasive replies but could offer no satisfactory explanation of his misconduct. So she left him in disgust and fled to her father, that never-failing source of comfort.

When old Sukra heard Devayani's sorry tale, he went to Yayati blazing with wrath, and demanded an explanation from him as to why he had broken his pledged word, given solemnly at time of his marriage, in respect of Sharmishta.

'Revered sage,' said Yayati in all humility, 'what person laying claim to

manliness, can refuse to lie with a young lady demanding co-habitation with her during her Rtu for the sake of progeny? I found myself in this predicament, and sages have ordained that in such a situation a man can, without blame, have relations with the woman so requesting.'

'What you say is perfectly correct,' agreed Sukra, and added, 'but in your case there is a difference. You went to Sharmishta's house without cause;

she did not come to your palace. So it is clear that your intentions were evil and the blame in this case rests entirely with you.'

Yayati could not deny his having gone to Sharmishta's house, and his explanation that an ill Fate had propelled him to sin was not accepted by Sukra. So he cursed Yayati to premature decrepitude which rendered the king impotent and incapable of further mischief for ever!

21

MANTRAGUPTA'S ADVENTURE

From Dandin's Dasa Kumara Charita. For Dandin and his works, see story No. 6.

MANTRAGUPTA, one of the ten princes who went in search of Rajavahana, came after many weeks of travel to the Kalinga country. By nightfall on a certain day, he reached the outskirts of the capital of Kalinga; tired by the weary journey, Mantragupta decided to take rest before entering the city and lay down on the slope of a hill that overlooked a cremation ground. Presently he heard two persons conversing, and from what he could make out of their conversation they were lovers who were disturbed by bad news. Impelled by curiosity, Mantragupta got up and proceeded to the spot from where the voices came, and saw a giant and his wife; the two were cursing their master, a mighty sorcerer.

The giant, in obedience to the mysterious summons from his master, left his weeping wife and proceeded towards the cremation ground, and Mantragupta followed him. Presently the giant came before a grisly form with unkempt beard, matted locks and

bloodshot eyes, wearing a garland of bones and skulls, made doubly dreadful by the flickering light from the embers of a fire into which he was throwing magical herbs, repeating potent spells. 'At your service, my lord,' said the giant, kneeling down.

'Proceed atonce,' commanded the sorcerer, 'to the palace of Kardana, king of Kalinga, and bring here Kana-kalekha, his daughter.'

The giant disappeared instantly and in a matter of minutes brought to his master a most lovely girl, wriggling in his hands, and laid her before the fire. The sorcerer got up, took a knife with a curved edge, and as he lifted the dreadful weapon to sever the head of the struggling princess held down by the giant, Mantragupta leapt on the sorcerer, snatched the knife from his hand and cut off his head. The princess, now released by the giant, stood before the prince, confused and not knowing what all this meant, when the giant fell at Mantragupta's feet and said: 'Good Sir,

whoever you are, you have done a wonderful and virtuous deed. This cruel monster of a man whom you have killed, had kept me as his slave through the power he had obtained by the practice of the black arts. He never gave me a moment's rest but always forced me to go on errands of evil as he drew his magic powers from the sacrifice of young ladies to infernal demons. Now that you have killed the beast, I am your slave. Pray, tell me what your command is.'

'First of all,' said Mantragupta, 'you must restore this princess to her parents; so take her back to the palace.'

At this point princess Kanakalekha, who felt like a dove saved from a chasing hawk, shed tears of joy and

spoke: 'You have, no doubt saved me from the sword of this evil sorcerer; but do not, pray, consign me to the more dreaded arrows of Cupid. If it is your desire that I should go back to my palace, I shall go, but not without you.' And with languid grace she shot a side glance at the prince which pierced his heart. Mantragupta wished to take her in his arms and drink the nectar of her red lips. But he hesitated. The princess easily enough decoded love's secret message and said boldly: 'Have no fear, my lord. Come with me. I am not married or betrothed to any one. You will live in my palace unknown to any one except to my trusted maids, and when the time arrives, we will divulge our secret to my parents. I am sure they



will have no objection to our marriage, whoever you may be, since you have saved my life.'

Mantragupta could not but obey; the pitiless Kama had already conquered him for the princess, and made him her slave.

So the giant took the two to the palace of Kanakalekha and left them in her boudoir unknown to any one. Mantragupta gave the giant his freedom and asked him to live happily with his loving wife in the forest without any fear of a cruel master.

Mantragupta and Kanakalekha lived happily together in the palace, and the days and nights were spent in dalliance and pleasure. And then came the great Festival of Spring. It was celebrated for thirteen days throughout the kingdom by the rich and the poor, by nobles and plebians; all, freed from the oppression of work and care, donned festal clothes, ate, drank, sang, danced and made merry to their hearts' content. The king decided to spend the holidays with the ladies of his court in a woodland near the sea. Mantragupta could not go for fear of detection, but Kanakalekha had to accompany the other ladies of the court. The princess consoled her lover on parting that she would be back after thirteen days, if not earlier, and all would be well with him. She detailed some of her trusted maids to look after him and they were made to stay back on the pretext of looking after her palace and the gardens.

Soon after Kanakalekha's departure, bad news reached Mantragupta. While Kardana was picnicking at the seaside, Jayasimha, king of the Andhra

country, who had received from his spies report of the movement of the Kalinga court, made a sudden two-pronged attack by sea and land, captured Kardana and the whole party, including Kanakalekha, and marched them off to the Andhra capital. Mantragupta could very well see the motive of Jayasimha's dastardly act, which was not aimed at territorial gains but meant to capture the princess, renowned for her beauty, and force her to marry him; Mantragupta knew that the spirited princess would resent his advances, and might in an extremity put an end to her life if the wicked Jayasimha tried to force her. So Mantragupta had to act, and act quickly.

Mantragupta immediately got out of the palace which was now to him like a cage from which the bird had flown away. He sallied forth into the city and reached the market place where he met a Brahmin spy who had returned from the Andhra capital with news of the king and Kanakalekha. Mantragupta learned from him that there was a rumour in Andhra that Jayasimha wanted to slay Kardana but had spared his life in the hope that he would persuade his daughter to marry him. But Kanakalekha, it was said, was possessed by a Yaksha* and was behaving in a strange manner, and Jayasimha first wanted the evil spirit to be exorcised; for this he had requisitioned the services of all the necromancers and sorcerers of his kingdom but the persistent devil re-

* In ancient Indian literature, Yakshas and their women Yakshis appear as voluptuous semi-mythical beings fond of young mortals. They are said to be under the control of Kubera, God of Wealth.

used to leave the princess in spite of all their efforts.

This news gave Mantragupta hope. Collecting some companions by making handsome payments, he proceeded to the capital of Andhra, and travelling day and night reached the outskirts of the city in a few days. He had taken particular care not to wash, comb or dress his hair in order to acquire the wild look of a hermit. Then donning a mask of matted locks and unkempt beard, he sat under a tree on the shore of a wide lake between the forest and the city, and gave himself up to contemplation of the Infinite. Some of his companions remained with him as his disciples while the rest, well-tutored, went into the city to spread his fame.

Soon it was noised abroad that a sage well versed in the four Vedas and six Darsanas and a master of the eight Siddhis had appeared on the outskirts of the city; that he was omniscient, knew master-spells that could cast out the most obstinate devils from the possessed. The hermit and his attainments became the talk of the town and people came to see him from far places.

And now the expected happened. King Jayasimha began to visit the holy man daily to pay him his respects. The sage himself practised severe austerities, but his disciples were found not averse to the enjoyment of the good things of life; so the king invited them to his palace off and on, feasted and entertained them, gave them gifts and generally wormed his way into their confidence. Then when he felt that he could broach the subject he had in

mind to the holy man, Jayasimha asked the disciples to arrange a secret meeting with the sage. Accordingly, on an auspicious day, the king met the holy man and begged him to exorcise the demon that had possessed Kanakalekha.

After listening to the king, the holy man looked steadfastly at Jayasimha and then closed his eyes. Drawing inspiration from mysterious powers, the sage said : 'I can see that Kanakalekha is the most desirable and auspicious of women. Any one who wins her can not only obtain personal pleasures, but also dominion over the earth.... I am, my son, well pleased with the attention you have bestowed on me and my disciples, and your implicit faith in me.... Now, for three days you must do penance and observe ceremonial purity. You must take but one meal a day and avoid all contact with women. At the end of the three days come to me and I shall tell you what you must do in order to cure Kanakalekha and win her love.'

The king bowed to the sage and departed. He spent the next three days observing all the rules of ceremonial purity; he took but one meal a day, prayed day and night, and observed strict continence.

During these three days Mantragupta was equally busy in another field. He procured a spade and after nightfall, dismissing his devotees and disciples, worked hard till dawn to scoop out a hollow at water level on the edge of the lake, not far from the landing place; in two nights he completed digging out a cave sufficiently large for a man to sit in with enough air space for the head.

After three days, the king came punctually at sunrise. The sage with becoming dignity thus divulged his plans to the king: 'The obstinate Yaksha who has possessed the princess can be exorcised only through the power of the holy water of the lake and the spiritual merit you have gained through austerity. For this, the lake has first to be consecrated. Then you have to be purified by immersion in a spot which I have selected. At the auspicious time, which is just before midnight, you must remain immersed at the place for a minute. And when you swim out of the lake after this immersion, you will be a changed man. Now you must go, take counsel with your courtiers and post sentries all around the lake, lest any harm should befall you through your enemies.'

Highly pleased, the king departed. He summoned an emergency meeting of his Council of Ministers and secretly informed them of the hermit's plans. All the ministers and courtiers approved of the plan and orders were immediately issued to post trusted sentinels all around the lake. And soon the citizens began to whisper to one another that their king would that night undergo a mysterious ceremony, conducted by the puissant sage, which would transform the elderly Jayasimha into a handsome youth, a fit bridegroom for the lovely Kanakalekha.

Well before midnight the king came to the lake with a few trusted companions, ready for the immersion. The sage informed him of the exact place of immersion which, to be sure, was near the cave he had scooped out. He also told him how long he had to

remain in the water. After thus giving him final instructions Mantragupta blessed the king and said: 'You will emerge from the lake a younger and more handsome man and then you must immediately return to the palace; the moment the princess sees you the Yaksha will leave her and she will embrace you.... For my part, my business is finished and I shall leave this place immediately you depart.' And he dismissed the king and his companions, closed his eyes and refused to listen to his supplications to stay back.

The king, seeing that the decision of the sage to leave the place was irrevocable, took leave of the sage and proceeded to the landing place. Here he dismissed his companions, stripped himself, left his robes on the steps and got into the lake.

As soon as the king had left him, Mantragupta rushed to the cave he had scooped out and awaited the arrival of the king. When the king swam towards the spot earmarked for the immersion, Mantragupta dived towards him, caught him by the legs, choked and killed him by the 'crocodile trick' of which he was a master. Then he dragged the body to the cave, tied it to a stone and sank it. After this, he swam to the landing stage, rubbed himself with a towel, and put on the royal robes Jayasimha had left. The king's companions noticed by the starlight that the king, as predicted by the sage, had become a young handsome man. The chief of the guards dismissed the sentries and Mantragupta with the king's companions rode back to the palace.

By daybreak the whole city was agog with the news of the king's metamorphosis. Mantragupta appeared in the court, and the courtiers all wondered how young and handsome their old king had become, and thanksgiving ceremonies were performed by pious Brahmins all over the city for the hermit who had worked the miracle.

With his physical appearance, the king's mind too seemed to have changed. He cancelled all oppressive taxes, and declared a week's public holiday. At night, Mantragupta entered the harem of Jayasimha. He first sent

for a handmaid of Kanakalekha, a girl captured with the princess and known to him while he had lived in the Kalinga palace. When the girl came he enquired of her if she had by any chance seen him. She immediately recognized Mantragupta and was filled with joy. She then conducted him to Kanakalekha, and on seeing Mantragupta, no need to say, the Yaksha who had possessed her instantly left her and she fell into his arms and wept for joy. Mantragupta explained to her how he had come there, and asked her to keep the matter secret.

Next the princess and Mantragupta visited Kardana and his wife and released them. Kanakalekha told her father all about Mantragupta, how he had saved her first from the sorcerer and then from the wicked Jayasimha. All were astonished at the daring and resourcefulness of the young man, and Kardana declared that he could think of no better suitor for his daughter's hand. Accordingly, a day was fixed for the wedding which was celebrated throughout the Andhra kingdom with the greatest rejoicings, the people of Andhra still believing that their king was Jayasimha transformed. For his part, Kardana was only too glad to give over his kingdom to Mantragupta, and thus the young man became the king of both Andhra and Kalinga.

Soon after Mantragupta's coronation, he had to lead an army to the help of his ally the Anga king, and on his way, he happened to meet prince Rajavahana (see page 34) and to him he narrated this tale.



22

UPAKOSHA AND HER FOUR LOVERS

From Somadeva's Katha Sarit Sagara. See story No. 11.

IN THE CITY of Pataliputra, the capital of the kingdom of Magadha, there lived a Brahmin by name Vararuchi. He was very religious and learned and there were few men in the world to equal him in wisdom and knowledge of the scriptures. Once, however, he was defeated by the famous savant Panini who had, by a special favour of the great god Shiva, obtained invincibility in polemics. Chagrined, Vararuchi decided to obtain omniscience by propitiating the gods through severe penance in the woods, and he made arrangements for leaving Pataliputra for the forests of the Himalayas. As he had no dependable male relatives, he entrusted his wealth to his friend Hiranyagupta, a well-known merchant of Pataliputra, and asked him to give his wife whatever money she needed. And then leaving his wife in the care of the gods, Vararuchi departed to the forests of the north.

Upakosha, Vararuchi's wife, was a young and beautiful woman, as virtuous as she was lovely. Though she sorrowed at the departure of her beloved husband, she bore her misfortune like a faithful wife as he had left her with the laudable object of gaining omniscience.

Upakosha's beauty and accomplishments were well known throughout the kingdom, and four evil men of Pataliputra, veritable gluttons for pleasure, lusted after her as eagles after their prey. These four men were the royal chaplain, the king's minister, the chief magistrate of the city, and the merchant Hiranyagupta. Ever since Vararuchi's departure, they were plotting day and night as how to get access to Upakosha and entice her to bed.

One day, while Upakosha was returning home after a bath in the stream, looking fresh and more lovely than ever, the king's minister accosted her



in a lonely spot. Upakosha realised that resistance would be futile; there was none nearby to run to her help if she raised an alarm, and the minister was in a mood to resort to force in case of rejection of his suit. So she said to him with a smile and apparent joy: 'Most powerful Sir, ever since I came to this city and set my eyes upon you, I have been pining for you; I have always cherished your image in my heart, and have constantly prayed for the pleasure of meeting you in private. There is no greater man in this city whom a young lady could desire more. In fact, I think the gods have sent you to me this day in answer to my prayer.... But this place, as you know, is not safe for us. Some chance wayfarer might come upon us and if a report is spread in the city, it will augur no good either for you or me. You know, the Festival of Spring is

due shortly; come to me on that date, in the first watch of the night, and we shall have our heart's desire.'

The minister could very well see the sense in her argument, and agreed to visit her in the first watch of the night on the Festival of Spring, as suggested by Upakosha.

She had not gone far on her way home, when the royal chaplain stopped her. He too protested his burning passion for her and insisted on its immediate satisfaction; but Upakosha by clever speech put him off too, and gave him an appointment for the second watch of the night on the Festival of Spring.

That day an evil conjunction of stars seemed to threaten her virtue, for as Upakosha proceeded towards her house after meeting the chaplain, she found her path obstructed by the powerful chief magistrate of the city. Like the minister and the chaplain, he too begged for her favours and threatened to do violence if she refused, and to him Upakosha allotted the third watch of the night of the Spring Festival for secret pleasure.

Now, Upakosha wished to honour Brahmins with gifts of clothes, cash and gold on the day of the Festival of Spring, and as she was short of cash, she went to the merchant Hiranyagupta, who held her husband's money in trust, for part payment of the deposit. But Hiranyagupta had all along been suffering from wounds the love-god Kama had inflicted on him, and at sight of Upakosha, his pent up passion flared up. 'Upakosha,' he said, 'I have been dying of love for you. Pray stay back in my house; let us spend the night together and in the



morning you shall have all the money you want, and even more. But if you do not, you may forget all about your money. Your husband, you must know, is as good as dead, and there are no witnesses to his having entrusted his wealth to me; nor is there a written document between us. If I do not give you any money, you will be reduced to penury in a short while. But with me as your lover, you will be the richest lady in Pataliputra and I know you are intelligent enough to choose riches to poverty.'

Upakosha could see that what the perfidious merchant said was the truth, and the most unpleasant truth at that.

There was neither document nor witness to prove his breach of trust; the little cash she had was fast running out, and in a few months' time she would be reduced to beggary, if Hiranyagupta refused to give her money. In this predicament, Upakosha once again had recourse to her wit. 'Do you think, my dear Hiranyagupta,' she said pretending coyness, 'that I have come to you for mere money? Ever since my husband went away, I have been planning for an opportunity to meet you secretly, and fix an appointment. Whom else but you can a young woman desire for company and pleasure? You are the richest man in

Pataliputra, and have looks and brains besides. I have, in fact, come today to invite you to my house on the night of the Spring Festival. Any intimacy between us here in your house will be imprudent. There are many servants in the house, both male and female, not to talk of your own wives and relatives. And scandal, as you know, has a thousand tongues. So come to my house late in the fourth watch of the night of the Spring Festival; I will be alone in the house with trusted servants only, as I will be giving the rest a holiday for the festival, and we two shall drink of the cup of pleasure to our hearts' content.'

The fool took the bait like a hungry fish. Flattered by the compliments Upakosha paid him, the fat merchant imagined himself the most handsome man in the city, and gave her all the money she asked for.

On the day of the Spring Festival, Upakosha decorated her house gaily; in the evening she donned her finest clothes and costliest ornaments and resplendent in her jewellery sat in the front room of her house, awaiting the arrival of her lovers.

Punctually at the start of the first watch of the night came the king's minister, oiled and perfumed, gaudily dressed like a bridegroom going to his wedding. Upakosha received him with a sweet smile. Carefully closing and bolting the door behind them, she conducted him to an adjoining room. Here she told him: 'I am so happy to see that you have not forgotten the appointment. You shall now have your bath, and my expert maidservants, proficient in the art of the pleasures of the tub, will attend on you and anoint

you with perfumed oil. After that, we shall eat, drink, talk and sleep.' The minister was delighted with the prospect, and presently appeared a bevy of young girls who conducted the lover to his bath. They had been previously instructed by Upakosha as to what was to be done with that night's guests. So the girls took the minister to the tub, stripped him, gave him heady drinks, massaged his limbs, told him clever stories, and when he was drunk enough to confuse red with green, daubed him, in the dim light, with a black dye. As the minister lay lolling in the tub under the cajolements of the girls, the first watch of the night passed, and the noise of footsteps was heard in the front room. One of the girls cautiously tiptoed to the door, peeped through the keyhole, and came hurrying back in ostentatious confusion. 'We are undone,' she whispered to the minister; 'the royal chaplain, who is a great friend of our master, has come to pay his Spring Festival compliments to our lady and enquire about the master. As you know, he is an intimate family friend and the whole house is open to him; and what is more, in his visits he takes particular care to come even to the bathrooms and the kitchen and wish us all the servants well. And if he discovers you here in the bath it will go ill with you and our mistress; the priest, as you know, has the king's ear.'

Drunk as he was, the minister had sufficient sense left to appreciate the danger of the situation, and he got up from his tub in confusion. 'The best thing we can do,' suggested one of the girls, 'is to hide you in a big box we have in the next room till the chaplain's

departure.' The minister was in a mood to accept any suggestion to save himself, and he was hurried to the box in such haste that he had no time even to put on his loin cloth. On his entering the open box, the lid was firmly closed and safely locked.

The chaplain was likewise given a bath, dyed, and locked up in another box on the arrival of the magistrate who, when the merchant came, was locked up in a third box.

The impatient merchant was, then, taken by Upakosha to the room where the three boxes were kept. There, within the hearing of the prisoners, she asked the merchant who was, needless to say, ignorant of what the boxes contained, for the money her husband had given him in trust. The merchant, finding the attitude of Upakosha quite different from what he had expected, told her angrily that he would not give her a pie out of Vararuchi's money unless she treated him with courtesy, and slept with him that very night. On this, Upakosha asked her servants to lay hold of him for coming to foul a friend's bed, beat him to a jelly, strip him naked and throw him into the street. This was promptly and efficiently done, and the bald, pot-bellied trader, without a thread on his bare body, ran for dear life, a crowd of late merrymakers of the Spring Festival yelling at his heels.

Next morning, when the king of Pataliputra sat in his court for hearing complaints from the citizens, Upakosha presented her petition to the king for ordering the merchant Hiranyagupta to pay her the money Vararuchi had entrusted to him. The merchant was duly summoned before the king and questioned. He denied having re-

ceived any money either from Vararuchi or Upakosha, and the king asked the complainant if she had any witness or document to prove the transaction.

'There is no document, Your Majesty,' said Upakosha, 'nor have I any human witnesses; but the gods will speak for me, if you will grant me permission to produce them in the court.'

The request of the plaintiff greatly intrigued the king and the court, and permission was readily granted to her to bring in celestial witnesses. On this, Upakosha had the three boxes containing the chaplain, the magistrate, and the minister brought into the courtroom. When the boxes were placed before the king, Upakosha addressed them thus: 'Ye, gods! last night ye heard the merchant Hiranyagupta confessing to have received money from my husband, but protesting that he would not give it back to me unless I slept with him. Ye must all tell the truth, and nothing but the truth; if, perchance, ye tell a lie, I will have the boxes lowered with the contents into a deep well filled with water.'

On this all the three boxes shouted in one voice that they had heard the merchant Hiranyagupta having so spoken.

The court was mystified, and the king ordered the boxes to be opened. Upakosha produced the keys, and the king's men opened the boxes, when out leapt from them, the king's minister, the royal chaplain, and the chief magistrate of the city, all naked and dyed black, looking like demons fresh from the nether regions.

And Upakosha told her tale. The king burst out into laughter, and had

a good look at his guardians of religion, administration, law and order. He promptly exiled these fools from his kingdom. The merchant was punished for breach of trust, and Upakosha was given rich gifts by the king for her fidelity to her husband, and for her re-

sourcefulness in dealing with the wicked.

* * * *

After a time Vararuchi returned from the forests of the north, and on hearing all that had happened, blessed his wife and lived happily with her ever after.

23

ADVENTURES OF ARGHAGHARGHATIKA

From Kshemendra's Samyamatrika or 'The Harlot's Breviary.' Kshemendra was a prolific Kashmiri writer who lived in the 11th. century A.D. One of his works is known as Brihad Katha Manjari, a collection of tales from Gunadhya's Brihad Katha (now lost) which had supplied the material for Somadeva's celebrated work Ocean of Story. Brihad Katha Manjari is, however, much smaller than the Ocean of Story. Though both Kshemendra and Somadeva lived in the 11th century they do not seem to have been contemporaries. Kshemendra wrote 'The Harlot's Breviary' as a warning to wantons. Here the courtesan is depicted not as the desirable and accomplished ruler of high society as she appears in the more ancient works like the Jataka Tales, Kama Sutra and Mricchakatika, but as a venal, vain, heartless, rapacious parasite on society against whom good men are warned. Whether this represents a changed popular attitude towards the oldest profession or merely reveals the author's personal prejudices, we cannot say.

IN THE CITY of Pravarapura, in the fair land of Kashmir, there lived Kalavati, a girl more lovely than the moonbeams. Her firm elevated bosom, arched eyebrows reminiscent of the bow of Kama, and sparkling



restless eyes proclaimed her profession.

One day, while Kalavati was sitting at the doorstep of her house, depressed and immersed in thought, the aged barber Kanka approached and asked her why she was looking so miserable. 'You look like the lotus after sundown, like a seedling scorched by the mid-summer sun. What has happened to you, my girl?' he asked.

'Good sir,' said Kalavati shedding tears; 'as you know, I have lost my mother who used to look after my household; she sat at the counter, dealt with my clients and was ever intent upon promoting my welfare. Now that she is gone, alas, to the land of no return, my clients have become unruly, payments have fallen into arrears, and I am well nigh ruined.'

The compassionate Kanka pitied her. 'Verily,' said he, 'a matron is indispensable to a courtesan. For a terrace without railings, a king without ministers, and a courtesan without a matron are three things that lead to woe.' 'Therefore,' he added, 'provide yourself with a matron as quick as possible.' Then, thinking for a while, Kanka said: 'By good fortune, my girl, there has come to this city, into this very street, the aged lady Arghagharghatika, after many adventures in distant lands. And she, methinks, is exactly the person who would mother you and revive your failing fortune.'

On this Kalavati wished to know more about Arghagharghatika, and Kanka thus narrated the adventures of this lady.

* * * *

In the city of Parihasapura there lived the woman Bhumika who kept

an inn. She had a pretty daughter by name Arghagharghatika, called Argha for short, whom she brought up in her traditional trade. Even as a child, Argha was exceedingly clever, and her prattle delighted her neighbours who invited her to feasts in their house. But every time little Argha attended a function, the host lost something—a silver spoon, ladle, vase or sacred vessel.

When Argha grew into glorious womanhood, she often visited the market place. One day, a wealthy merchant who had come to the town from a distant country, happened to see her, and he immediately succumbed to her charms. His name was Purnaka and he was sewn up in gold. Argha took him to her house, entertained him and plied him with much wine that went to his head. As the drunken merchant lay senseless in her lap, Argha relieved him of all his cash and ornaments, and then shouted for help as though a thief had broken into her house. On hearing the cry the neighbours ran to her help with cudgels, hatchets and knives, and in the tumult and the shouting Purnaka woke up and fled for dear life.

As Parihasapura was not a great centre for wealth, and people did not appreciate her 'good' work in the place, Argha moved to the rich city of Shankarapura. Here she set up a palatial establishment and did a roaring trade. Her fame rose high, and with it the number of her lovers. There were as many clients in her gay salon as there were stray dogs in the streets, and she could get neither rest nor peace in her own house; hence, very often she was compelled to go to the house of some

lover in order to evade the clamour of the customers who hung around her house day and night for her favours. On one such occasion, she went to the residence of the priest of the local shrine for peace and quiet, and the holy man was good enough to take her into the secret chamber of his house; but as the crowd of worshippers at the shrine came to have *darsan* of His Holiness, he was obliged to open the door of the inner shrine in order to hide Argha. Thus she found herself in the very sanctum of the deity. Not wishing to waste the opportunity the good gods had thus given her, Argha helped herself to all the gold and precious stones she found on the idol; and then as the priest, after the weary audience he gave the pious, lay snoring in his bedroom, she bolted with the booty.

Before the sacrilege in the shrine was discovered, Argha had gained the city of Pratapapura, far away; here she called herself Nagarika and easily enough found a patron in a wealthy farmer who had extensive estates and lived in the suburbs. Nagarika became his sole interest in life, which completely alienated his relatives from him; and one day the farmer was found clubbed to death in his father's orchard. The distress this bereavement caused Argha so moved the farmer's father that he, an old man named Shri Simha, took her under his protection. Argha took a fancy to the ancient and, under her fostering care, the senile farmer was rejuvenated like an old cobra that had sloughed its skin; she fed him on fish, marrow, garlic, onions and soup and he lavishing his wealth on her could not part one

moment from the young siren. His kith and kin took objection to this, his life became a public scandal, and when he was seen outside his house, even children pointed him out as the old dotard of Pratapapura. Farmer Simha, thus caught between a burning passion and a hostile public, committed suicide for very shame.

Collecting what cash she could lay her hands on, Argha fled from the house of the farmer to a new city where she lived under the assumed name of Mrigavati. She donned the white garb of a widow, went into mourning for the late farmer Simha, practised piety and performed pooja, and regularly visited the temple of Kali on the bank of a stream. The appearance of the comely widow attracted many gallants but she rejected their advances so persistently that she became easily the most coveted lady in the city. One day, however, Bindusara, the richest merchant in the city, happened to see her, and she took him as a heron takes a fish. She married him and went to live in his house.

In a month's time the fat merchant died suddenly, and Argha affected such a paroxysm of grief that none suspected the part she had played in his death. She declared that she could not live without him and even expressed a desire to burn herself with his dead body, but was persuaded to desist by the well-meaning friends of the late Bindusara, who pointed out to her that if she died there would be none left to look after his vast estate. Thus pressed, Argha reluctantly consented to live and look after her late husband's estate!

After the prescribed period of mourning was over, Argha felt relieved of her debt to the departed, and with the rich legacy left by Bindusara, lived a merry life.

The superintendent of the royal stables next fell for her. He was himself a veritable stallion, could not suffer separation from her, and often failed to attend to his duties in the palace. She sang to him in his bath and he kept time to her song. He could not say 'no' to anything that she said or did, but when Argha started trading in his furniture, his sons revolted. Their 'rebellion' led to a court case, and Argha's able lawyer, whom she paid in kind, got a decree in her favour. But while executing the

decree, the young men hatched a plot to murder her and, unable to combat this, Argha fled for her life and found asylum in a Buddhist convent; here she lived the life of a nun.

But the convent did not hold her long. Old age was, however, gaining upon her; Argha now requisitioned to her aid the services of beauty specialists. She dyed her hair, painted her wrinkling face, reddened her pale lips, put collyrium in her sinking eyes and set up an establishment in the city. She did not fare badly in her new venture, for there are many fools in the world who mistake paint for flesh and dye for complexion. These artificial aids were not, however, strong enough to attract a sufficient number of customers to keep her in affluence, and she supplemented her income by going into business with thieves; from them she bought stolen goods for next to nothing and sold them at an enormous profit. One day, however, Argha was caught red-handed by the police. She was tried, convicted and jailed. In the prison she made friends with the sentry who, forgetful of his duty, ate, drank and slept with her. One night when he was well drunk, in a moment of affected passion, she bit his tongue off and as he fell unconscious, Argha bolted from the prison.

That very night she came to the city of Vijayesvari where she gave herself a new name, Anupama. By her ancient craft she ingratiated herself into the favours of the king's minister, Bhogamitra, a veritable glutton for pleasure, and managed to get a goodly amount out of him by pandering to his perversities. With this money, she bought ornaments and fine clothes and



a graceful wig. She carefully raised her breasts by thin bands guilefully concealed under her jacket, put on a flaming red turban, and donned a delicate nose-veil through which her painted face was half seen. To the townsfolk, the lady Anupama, thus adorned, appeared an Apsara descended from the pleasure groves of the celestial region and as she passed through the streets, they exclaimed: 'What a beauty!'

The number of lovers who visited Anupama was many; but one night a client who was not drunk enough happened to see her naked in the flesh, and he fainted. And nothing could make him go anywhere near the street where she lived. This happened to many lovers; as a rule no sane lover ever went to her twice, and solvent drunks at the place were not numerous enough to make her keep body and soul together. In a word, Arghaghar-ghatika sank into oblivion, like a lamp kept in the blazing noonday sun, like a cooled room in snowfall, like a crown of withered flowers. An old whore, as the saying goes, is useless to every man.

Reduced to this strait, Arghaghar-ghatika took to street-walking and snared stray customers by moonlight. In course of time even this failed to pay, when she associated herself with a miserable mendicant named Bhairavasoma who lived by begging. As the mendicant went on his begging rounds, Argha took care to dress herself in gaudy finery and managed to charm a few fools and deprive them of their cash. And as she had infinite faith in her resourcefulness she disdained to lay by anything for a rainy day and

spent her cash before it was earned. But a famine devastated the land, the people did not have enough for their own needs, much less for giving alms, and Argha decided to desert Bhairavasoma. So one night, while he lay dead asleep, doped by the drugs he had consumed, she stole the trinkets of his idol and disappeared.

Argha travelled on foot and reached the city of Krityasrama. Here she affected a contempt for the pleasures of the world and joined a Buddhist convent. In the convent she was renamed Vajraghanta; strictly observing the vows of her order, the new nun lived in the cloister contemplating the Three Jewels of Buddhism. She wore rags, shaved her head, and holding her begging bowl in her crooked hands, went about the houses of the pious for alms, imitating the ways of seasoned nuns; soon she earned for herself a reputation in the city for piety and occult attainments. Vain women consulted her about their future, jealous husbands about their wives' past, young girls about their marriage and gallants for success in intrigues. Argha gave advice to all, charging them her professional fees, and selling them the love charms and lockets she always carried with her.

An intrigue with the servant of an important monk in a nearby monastery got Argha into serious trouble, and she became, in spite of her age, big with child. The expectant nun left the convent for the street. On the birth of her baby, she abandoned the innocent and travelled to a distant city.

In this new place she again procured wig and paint, called herself Ardhakshira, and told her tale so well

that Mitrasena, the king's minister, employed her as nurse for his new-born son whose mother had died of maternal distress at his birth. For a long time now, Argha had not seen good food, and in the minister's house she gorged herself. There was plenty to eat and drink, and none grudged her nourishment as she had to nurse the precious baby. Life was pleasant as a song, and Argha started putting on weight. But unfortunately for her, the baby contracted a fever and the leech who treated him recommended dietics and asked the nurse to fast so that the child, while sucking for relief, could get no milk. But fasting was the last thing the nurse could do; so though she agreed to starve herself, when every one was asleep at night she stole into the kitchen and helped herself to whatever she could lay her hands on. Under these conditions, the child took a turn for the worse and the nurse fearing detection fled at night, collecting what cash she could take from the minister's house.

On the outskirts of the city there was a forest inhabited by goatherds, and when she came into this region, Argha decided to retrieve her fortune by goat breeding. So with the cash she had she went into partnership with the chief of the goatherds. But as ill-luck would have it, when the breeding season came, a storm broke over the forest, floods devastated the region, the goats were all destroyed and Argha and the goatherds were reduced to penury. So all that our friend could do was to trundle to the city of Avanti with a blanket as her sole worldly possession.

Reaching Avanti she took on the pretty name of Tara, sold her blanket, bought cakes with the money and hawked them in the streets. Tara became a familiar figure in the streets of Avanti, and bakers started giving her credit in the hope of getting good profits on their loans. But few people had ever made much money out of Argha, and as her debts mounted, the cake-seller one fine night disappeared from Avanti!

After leaving Avanti, Arghagharghatika took to various occupations. Under the name and style of Kushalika, she peddled ghee; as Panjika she haunted gambling dens trading in cogged dice and false coins. These occupations did not pay well and she assumed the name of Madhurika and appeared in a temple selling flowers to worshippers. Madhurika won the confidence of the temple authorities and they appointed her a temple attendant and entrusted her with the cash needed for the daily decoration of the deity. One day, the flower-seller, taking the money from the temple for buying stock did not return and a search proved futile.

With the money she stole from the temple, Arghagharghatika travelled to a distant village and assumed the name of Hema; during the feast of the village god, she distributed water to the pilgrims, and keeping a wary eye for children who wore ornaments, deprived the little ones of their jewellery when they were busy drinking water from her jar. As people started searching for the lost ornaments, Hema left the fair and again slipped off to another village. Here she posed as a fortune teller; she had a glib tongue and ready wit, and the folk of

the places through which she wandered took her for an adept in secret sciences. She did magic rites for the cure of diseases, for gaining evil ends and for confounding and injuring enemies. There was in fact only one thing she could not do: Hema could not catch the thief in local larceny.

Moving to a town, Argha obtained a situation in a temple as the matron of the dancing girls. Here she was called Bhavasiddhi. She converted the temple into a brothel and was on the point of being dismissed when she feigned madness. Bhavasiddhi now became the talk of the town. It was noised abroad that she was possessed by an oracle in the temple precincts and could foretell the past, present and future events. Overnight, as it were, Bhavasiddhi became omniscient. Even Kuladasa, the king's minister, believed in her prophetic powers; he sent for her, she stayed in his house and he consulted her on all important affairs. But one dark night the oracle departed carrying with her all the precious things of Kuladasa's household!

Arghagharghatika migrated to a new city and with the money she had, took on rent a spacious mansion and started a tavern. The landlady called herself Kala. She built up a flourishing business, what with the merchants and wayfarers who came to the city and the gamblers and drunkards who made the tavern their nocturnal rendezvous. But every man who got drunk in Kala's tavern lost something. These thefts became frequent and the police began to take note of them. So one night when the customers in the tavern were well drunk and were

sleeping like the dead in a cemetery, Kala collected their belongings and moved to a city called Shurapura.

In Shurapura, getting sick of her lonely life, Argha married a porter. While her husband lay fast asleep after the day's hard labour, she fearlessly consorted with clients in the dark. After a time she felt that the porter-husband was too low for her status; moreover, a settled life bored her and so she left the porter and took to a wandering life.

Argha now called herself Satyavati, and wandered from place to place to study men and matters. She could talk very learnedly about the scriptures she had not read, and tell wonderful tales about pilgrim centres, like Gaya and Kedara, she had never seen. And wherever she went, her wisdom and experience impressed not only the common folk but even kings and ministers. She was also reputed to know a thing or two about secret sciences capable of stopping invading armies and quelling rebellion and disaffection in the country by the repetition of mysterious spells.

* * * *

'And this very person,' concluded Kanka, the barber, 'this famous Arghagharghatika of Parhasapura is now in our city, in this very street. And none, upon my word, is better qualified to mother you than this lady. So take her into your service and your fortune will swell like a stream after the rains.'

Impressed by the barber's tale, Kalavati sent for Arghagharghatika and appointed her as her mother and matron.

24

MALATI AND MADHAVA

From Bhavabhuti's Malati-Madhava. After Kalidasa, Bhavabhuti is considered the greatest playwright of ancient India. His exact date is not known but he is believed to have lived in the eight century A. D. His best known work is Malati-Madhava, a play often called the Indian 'Romeo and Juliet.' Bhavabhuti's style is somewhat laboured, but in his plots he often excels Kalidasa. His other important works are Uttara-Rama-Charita ('Later Days of Rama') and Mahavira-Charita.

IN THE CITY of Padmavati, a renowned centre for learning, there lived a famous lady teacher, Kamandaki by name, and many noblemen even from distant lands sent their children to her for their education. And Devarata, minister of the king of Vidarbha, hearing of the fame of Kamandaki, sent his young son Madhava to her school in Padmavati.

Devarata was not, however, without friends in Padmavati; for Bhurivasu, the minister of the king of Padmavati, was a school mate of his and the two had continued to cultivate good relations even after leaving school, and had very often met each other. And the two statesmen decided that Madhava, Devarata's son, should marry Malati, Bhurivasu's daughter, in order to strengthen their friendship by a matrimonial alliance.

The king of Padmavati had, however, his own plans for the marriage of Malati, his minister's daughter. He had a favourite by name Nandana, whose marriage to Malati, he thought, would promote his political interests. When the king told him of his decision, Bhurivasu was grieved; for one thing he had already promised Devarata that he would give Malati in marriage to Madhava, and for another, Nandana, unlike the boy Madhava, was an elderly man. Bhurivasu, however, dared not reject the king's proposal, lest he should incur his displeasure; so while agreeing to abide by the king's decision he took Kamandaki, Madhava's teacher, into his confidence, acquainted her of the covenant between Devarata and himself, and instructed her to see that Madhava and Malati would grow up in mutual love so that the two lovers would



eventually marry according to the Gandharva rite* and present their parents and the king with a *fait accompli*. Kamandaki readily closed in with Bhurivasu's proposal as she thought it a pity that the lovely Malati should be forced to marry the old decrepit Nandana.

Years passed and Malati grew into a beautiful young woman, and Madhava into a handsome dashing youth. While learning the sacred lore of his race from Kamandaki, Madhava was also trained at Padmavati in the use of weapons, in horsemanship, and many other manly sports. Madhava had a friend and colleague called Makaranda and the two became inseparable companions.

Kamandaki took care to send Madhava frequently on idle errands near Bhurivasu's house so that Malati could see him. And Lavangika, Malati's cousin who stayed with her and was in Kamandaki's confidence, saw to it that while Madhava passed her house Malati should watch him from her room. And every time she saw the handsome young man she sighed and wished that he would look towards her.

The image of Madhava was so impressed on her mind that Malati drew a picture of the young man. Lavangika took the picture and gave it to Mandarika, a maidservant in Kamandaki's school. Mandarika was in love with Kalahamsa, Madhava's servant, and Lavangika instructed Mandarika to send the picture to Madhava through her lover.

Before the picture reached Madhava he had, however, a chance to see

Malati. On the feast of the love-god Kama, Malati with her friends went to the temple of the god situated in an extensive grove in the heart of the city. Madhava too had strayed into the temple precincts, and as he lay idly in the shade of a spreading flowering tree,

There issued from the fane a
beauteous maid.

As slender as the lotus stalk her
shape,

Her pallied cheeks, like unstained
ivory,

Rivalled the beauty of the spotless
moon.

To mould her charms whatever
nature offers

Fairest and best, had surely been
assembled,

And Love omnipotent was her
creator!

Malati with her companions proceeded to the tree under which Madhava was loitering, in order to collect flowers, and saw her lover. Not wishing to intrude into Madhava's solitude, the girls hastily picked a few flowers and went away.

Though Madhava was seeing Malati for the first time, her shy, furtive glances, the whispered talk of the maids who seemed to refer to him, all convinced Madhava that he was no stranger to her. And what was most heartening, after the departure of Malati, while Madhava was longingly watching the retreating train, one of the girls, apparently in search of flowers, approached him and looking wistfully at a garland he had woven to while away his time, asked him if he would be good enough to sell the

* For Gandharva marriage,
See page 23.

garland to her. She was Lavangika, she said, cousin of Malati, Bhurivasu's daughter. Malati, Lavangika told Madhava, was a great lover of flowers, and would be delighted to buy the exquisite work of the florist's art that was in his possession; she was a princess related to the royal house of Padmavati, Lavangika informed Madhava, and was in a position to pay any price for the garland.

So now Madhava knew that the maiden who had conquered his heart was Malati, Bhurivasu's daughter. And it pleased him not a little to learn that she appreciated his skill in making garlands. For Lavangika's information he told her that he was not a florist but Madhava, son of Devarata, the minister of the king of Vidarbha. He gave her the garland, and Lavangika thanked him on behalf of Malati and departed.

Madhava now lost interest in his lessons and often wandered in the groves of the love-god in the company of his friend Makaranda, talking of the wonderful maidens of Padmavati in general and of Malati in particular. And it was while the two young men were thus loitering in the groves of Kama one day that Madhava's servant Kalahamsa brought the picture of Madhava and gave it to him.

'This was given to me by my friend Mandarika,' said the impish Kalahamsa; 'she thought you may be interested as it was painted by Malati; she came by it through chance, and wants it back.'

When Madhava saw the picture he was so amazed by the skill of the fair artist that he was moved to paint a picture of Malati. When Mandarika

came to claim her picture, Kalahamsa pretended that he had lost it and gave in its place the picture of Malati Madhava had painted.

Mandarika duly passed the picture to Lavangika who in turn gave it to Malati. She was thus reassured of Madhava's love for her, and the young lovers were anxiously looking forward to the day when their love could be consummated in marriage.

And then came bad news. The king of Padmavati officially announced the date of the marriage of Malati to his favourite Nandana, and declared it to be a day of public rejoicing!

On receiving the distressing news, Kamandaki with her disciples and friends held a secret conference at which Malati was present. The latter expressed surprise at the king's announcement and wondered how her father, who always doted on her, could have given his consent to her marriage to the old and pot-bellied Nandana. 'Alas!' she wailed, 'I am made an offering to the king by my father!'

The learned Kamandaki who knew something of the ways of kings and statesmen, their policies and politics, said :

'Tis most strange,

How he could overlook the vast defects

Of such an alliance. But how can those

Feel natural affection for their offspring,

Whose souls are sunk in schemes of policy?

His only thought is clearly to secure
The friendship of the monarch's
chosen friend

And boon companion, by his daughter's person.

Lavangika agreed: 'tis as you say, dame, or why should our young Malati be sacrificed to age and ugliness?'

Kamandaki now told Malati: 'To young ladies, obedience to their superiors is no doubt a virtue; but there are times when disobedience becomes a duty. Whatever be the motive of the king, you have a right to choose your own husband since you have now come of age. Furthermore there are instances in the history of our race wherein highborn ladies had selected their own husbands without consulting their parents or guardians and married them according to the Gandharva rite. Shakuntala, for example, married Dushyanta without asking her guardians. The chaste goddess Sati married the mendicant god Shiva against the orders of her father Daksha. So, my dear Malati, you are the mistress of your own self, and are not bound to obey the king in the matter of your marriage. Your father, being the minister of the king, is not in a position to flout the orders of his master, but you have every right to marry the man you love.'

Malati got interested in the biographies of the independent ladies of her race who had married men of their choice, and wished to hear more about such heroines; and Kamandaki, from her vast store of ancient lore, regaled her with many tales of young ladies who had married according to the Gandharva rite. Eventually, Malati fell in with Kamandaki's proposal to marry Madhava secretly; accordingly, a plot was hatched by the ladies to frustrate the designs of the king and

Nandana, and get Malati married to Madhava.

As soon as Madhava heard the royal proclamation fixing the date of Malati's marriage to Nandana, he was sunk in despair. And not knowing what Kamandaki was planning, nor caring to seek any human aid, he resorted to a desperate remedy. He felt that the good gods had deserted him, and decided to seek the aid of the infernal powers.

So the very night of the date on which the royal proclamation was issued, Madhava went to a shrine of Chamunda, the goddess of terror, situated in a desolate field near a cremation ground where human sacrifices were performed for the pleasure of the goddess, in order to invoke infernal powers and frustrate the king's designs so that he could obtain Malati for himself.

When Madhava reached the shrine, the sickening sight almost unnerved him; the whole atmosphere was filled with terror; skulls and broken bones were littered about the place, jackals and corpse-eating night-birds were feeding on fetid human flesh, and the air reeked with the smell of burning hair, flesh and bones.

Taking courage, Madhava advanced to the outer hall of the shrine where sat the weird Kapalakundala, the priestess and oracle of Chamunda. As he reached the priestess, he heard the pitiful cries of a woman from the altar in the inner shrine; the woman was obviously that night's victim, about to be sacrificed to the goddess. The wild voice of the victim, terror-stricken as it was, sounded strangely familiar to Madhava. He listened with

intense attention. No, there was no mistaking it. He had heard Malati's voice only once, while she was playfully talking to her companions in the pleasure groves of Kama, but it was imbedded deep down in his soul and he could never mistake it. Definitely, it was the voice of his Malati.

Madhava rushed to the inner shrine sword in hand, just in time to save the fair Malati from the uplifted sword of Aghoraghanta, the priest of Chamunda! The priest and his men resisted the intrusion, and in the fight and confusion that ensued, Malati escaped and Aghoraghanta was slain. With the greatest difficulty Madhava fought his way back to safety. Kapalakundala, who was mainly responsible for capturing Malati from her house for the bloody sacrifice, swore undying vengeance on Madhava for depriving the goddess of her offering and for killing her priest Aghoraghanta and declared on oath before the goddess that she would again seize Malati and sacrifice her at her altar.

Malati was saved from the sacrificial stake in Chamunda's shrine only to fall a slow-dying victim to despair. Under royal patronage all arrangements were made for the marriage of Malati and Nandana, and the auspicious hour during which the ceremony was to be performed was duly announced. And Malati and Madhava lived in dread of the fateful day.

But there came hope. For Kaman-daki and her disciples worked out certain plans to prevent Malati's marriage to Nandana, and they informed both Madhava and Malati of the details.

At last the wedding day dawned. Before proceeding to the marriage hall for the wedding rites, the bride had to visit the temple of the love-god Kama and worship at the shrine. Accordingly Malati, gaily dressed and heavily veiled as becoming a bride, came to the temple, and leaving the train at the gate entered the shrine with Lavangika as her maid of honour. After worshipping the deity, Malati was quietly led by Lavangika to a cell inside the temple where Madhava and his friend Makaranda were waiting with Kamandaki and her trusted attendants. Here the last detail of the plot was revealed to Malati: Madhava and Malati were to be secretly married on the spot by Kamandaki and were to depart by the back door into the grove and remain in hiding, while Makaranda was to don the bridal vestments and veil and impersonate Malati. Brought up under strict parental authority, Malati expressed some doubts about the propriety of her taking so bold a step without the knowledge of her father; but Kamandaki set at rest the qualms of her conscience by confiding to her the real intentions of her father and his secret instructions concerning her marriage, and the reason why he was not openly objecting to her wedding with Nandana. Thus enlightened, Malati readily agreed to abide by the decisions of Kamandaki; accordingly, Malati and Madhava, after a brief marriage ceremony performed by Kamandaki, escaped to the groves of Kama, while Makaranda, in the bridal robes and veil, was led back to the waiting throng at the gate by Lavangika. The merry procession proceeded to the wedding hall where the marriage

ceremony was performed with regal pomp and show.

That night, after the tiresome ceremonials of the day, when the elderly Nandana repaired to the nuptial chamber to enjoy his conjugal rights with the lovely young Madhavi, he found a resentful bride, refusing to take off her bridal veil; he very naturally put this down to the bashfulness of the maiden, inexperienced in the art of love. So Nandana cajoled and coaxed his bride, but finding no response, tried to force her, when he was thrown out of the room by a vicious kick on his paunch by the bride. Nandana wondered how any woman could ever swing so strong a leg. Anyway, he did not deem it safe to enter the nuptial chamber that night, and so sent in his young sister Madayantika, a friend of Lavangika and Malati, to tame the shrew, and repaired to the sick chamber to nurse his aching paunch. And what was her surprise when Madayantika found herself alone with Makaranda, the lover whom she had always been dreaming

of! Makaranda had once saved her life at great personal danger to himself from a ferocious tiger that had broken loose from the palace zoo and started chasing her; from that day, the two had been pining for each other's company, but though they had made known their love for each other through intermediaries and friends like Lavangika, this was the first time they were meeting after the adventure with the tiger.

Makaranda now told Madayantika that Malati and Madhava were married secretly and the two of them would do likewise. Neither the king nor Nandana, he pointed out to her, was likely to be very happy to know that the person whom her brother had married was not the fair maid Malati but the tiger-killer Makaranda, and their only safety would be in elopement and Gandharva marriage. It was not easy for Madayantika to choose between the betrayal of her brother and that of her lover, but the difficulty was not insurmountable, and eventually she agreed to Makaranda's proposal and decided to elope with him. The time was opportune; the day hadn't dawned, there was still sufficient darkness to permit of prowling, and the two lovers quietly got out of the nuptial chamber by the back door and moved through the trees in the parks towards the gate of the palace which they hoped to pass unnoticed by dozing sentries.

Meanwhile, Malati and Madhava, who were in hiding, left the groves of Kama when the city fell asleep, and reached Madhava's dwelling. Madhava, could get little rest that night. Though he was happy to be with Malati, he



felt restless as he thought constantly of Makaranda; in making him impersonate Malati, Madhava knew that he had exposed his friend to grave danger, as Nandana and the king were not likely to take it as a joke when the fraud would be discovered; and it was sure to be discovered that night. So he detailed his servant Kalahamsa to keep vigil near the palace of Nandana for possible developments, and thus spent a sleepless night.

And things did turn out as Madhava had feared. Just before daybreak Kalahamsa came running to him with evil news. While Madayantika and Makaranda were trying to escape, Kalahamsa said, the guards discovered and stopped Makaranda, and he was fighting against odds to get back to safety. Scarcely had Kalahamsa narrated this when Madayantika and Lavangika came running to Madhava's residence to inform him that Makaranda's life was in danger. On hearing this, Madhava forgetting all took his sword and flew to the help of his friend. And Kalahamsa followed his master.

The ladies thus left alone were too confused for logical action. Malati and Madayantika, anxious about the safety of their lovers, asked Lavangika to follow and contact their lovers and request them not to expose themselves to unnecessary danger, if not for their own sake, at least for the sake of the ladies who loved them. As Lavangika fled on this errand, the restless and worried Malati, feeling that it would be better if she herself went to Madhava, followed Lavangika, asking Madayantika to remain in the house.

And as Malati was running alone to Nandana's palace, the evil Kapala-

kundala, priestess of Chamunda, who had been persistently following her like a shadow, had the opportunity she had been looking for; and she fell upon Malati with her henchmen, gagged her and carried her off.

Lavangika could not bear the sight of the dreadful conflict; nor could she get access to the madly fighting youths. So she returned to Madhava's house frustrated, without having achieved anything. As Madayantika and Lavangika were spending anxious moments in the house, not knowing what to do, Kalahamsa brought them good news. Madhava and Makaranda, he said, fought like heroes against the guards. The king, hearing of the fray, arrived at Nandana's palace, and both the young men, when ordered by the king, stopped fighting, went to him and paid homage. The king, already impressed by their valour, was greatly pleased by their obedience, and learning of their birth, condoned their trespasses, approved of Malati's marriage to Madhava, and ordered Nandana to get his sister married to Makaranda as the two lovers wished.

As Kalahamsa was giving the news, both the heroes of the day arrived in Madhava's house. But Malati was not there to greet her husband. No one seemed to know where she had gone, and a hurried search in the streets proved futile. Both Madhava and Makaranda now set out in search of her. But nowhere could Malati be found. She was not in the groves of the temple, in Kamandaki's establishment or even in the house of her father Bhurivasu. In despair the two young men rushed to the temple of Chamunda, but Malati was not there too.

Not finding Malati anywhere in the inhabited regions in and around Padmavati, Madhava and Makaranda went to the adjoining Vindhyan hills and ranged the wild region in search of her. Without food and drink, the young men wandered over hills, crags and pathless forests, calling out the name of Malati, and Madhava, exhausted by the futile search and worried over the fate of his beloved, collapsed; he showed signs of mental derangement and started raving. At last, physically and mentally spent up, Madhava fell down senseless.

Makaranda was heartbroken. An ill fate had turned their victory to rout, success into failure, bliss into despair. There was not a human being in sight in that wild place. Madhava was sinking and there was absolutely no means of reviving him. But Makaranda was determined not to return to Padmavati without his friend. In despair he took silent farewell of his dying friend and ascended a forbidding crag overhanging the precipitous valley below. He said his last prayer to the gods and was about to hurl himself down when a female apparition stopped him!

She was the ascetic Saudamini. She was a pupil of Kamandaki but had repaired to the Vindhyan hills to practise penance and obtain spiritual powers. While studying under Kamandaki, she had confided to Saudamini Bhurivasu's secret instructions concerning Malati and Madhava.

'This is an evil thing you are doing, my son,' said Saudamini to Makaranda; 'to destroy one's own life out of despair is the sign of the coward, and a sin. Besides, Malati whom you are

seeking is not dead but safe and sound.'

Saudamini now told Makaranda that by penance and prayer she had attained mystic insight and the knowledge of events past, present and future, and in accordance with her teacher's instructions had been ever watching the progress of love between Malati and Madhava. When Kapalakundala seized Malati and took her to the temple of Chamunda, Saudamini revealed, she had her transferred by her magic powers to her own hermitage. 'My hermitage is near by,' said Saudamini, 'and we shall go there. After the fearful experience of the day, Malati too, like Madhava, is exhausted and unconscious.'

Makaranda and Saudamini now went to Madhava; he was revived by the lady telling him that Malati was alive and safe, and she produced for him to see and believe the garland he had woven for her on their wedding day and which she was wearing when he left her to fight for Makaranda. The sight of the garland worked like magic. Madhava finding fresh energy leapt up. Saudamini then conducted the two young men to her hermitage where they found Malati lying semi-conscious. On hearing Madhava's voice, she too gained complete consciousness.

The friends of Malati had congregated in the house of Kamandaki who alone, they thought, was capable of rendering some help to the missing Malati and the young men who went in search of her, by her spiritual powers. And as Kamandaki was invoking the aid of the deities, she saw Malati, Madhava and Makaranda coming to her in the company of a lady ascetic!

Saudamini, who had not seen her old teacher ever since she had left her in girlhood, fell at Kamandaki's feet and narrated to her how she had always kept in mind her teacher's solemn promise to Bhurivasu; how she was watching the lovers and how she saved Malati from the dreaded Kapalakundala. Kamandaki raised her disciple affectionately by the hand and blessed her.

Further good news now came to them. The king and Nandana had officially declared the date and time for the marriage of Madayantika to Makaranda.

And this marriage was celebrated under royal patronage with the greatest rejoicing in the whole kingdom.

(Verses appearing in this Story are from H. H. Wilson's translation of the play).

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